

File
THE UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO

ECONOMIC FACTORS IN THE TRIUMPH
OF EARLY CHRISTIANITY

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BY
LLOYD BENJAMIN HARMON

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CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION

1. Social View-point.
2. Aim and Purpose
3. Scope
4. Importance of the Social and Economic Environment
5. The economic Interpretation of History

CHAPTER I. CHRISTIAN SOCIALISM

Introductory Definitions

1. Poverty and Its Amelioration
2. Wealth, Its Use and Distribution
3. Equalization

4. Communism

Conclusion

CHAPTER II. THE DECLINING PROSPERITY OF THE EMPIRE

Introduction

Background of First and Second Century Prosperity

1. Political Disorder
2. Exploitation of the Province
3. Debasement of the Coinage
4. Industry and Commerce
5. Shifting Population
6. Social Revolution
7. Failure of the Reforms of Diocletian

Summary of Economic Decline of the Empire

**CHAPTER III. THE GROWING ECONOMIC IMPORTANCE OF THE CHRISTIAN
BIBLIOTHECAE CHURCH IN ROMAN SOCIETY**

Introduction

The Inherent Vitality of the Christian Church

Statement of the Problem of the Chapter.

- 1. Numerical Importance of Christianity**
- 2. Invincible in Persecution**
- 3. Christians Individually Self-sustaining**
 - (a) Through work**
 - (b) Through business**
 - (c) Through public office**
 - (d) Through frugality**
 - (e) Wealth, the proof of individual self-support**
- 4. The Influence of a Self-sustaining Church**
 - (a) Voluntary support**
 - (b) Possession of their own church buildings**
 - (c) Other church property**
- 5. The Influence of the Church as an Organized Economic Unit.**
 - (a) The economic nature of the episcopate**
 - (b) The Catholic Church centering in Rome**
- 6. The Triumph**
 - (a) Circumstances of the triumph**
 - (b) Economic motives of Constantine**

CONCLUSION

Summary of Economic Factors

Social Implications of the Thesis

Triumph of the Principle of Cooperation

Economic Factors in the Triumph the Most Important Factors

BIBLIOGRAPHY

1. Social Viewpoint.

When we study history from the social point of view, we are constantly reminded that we are dealing with real people, living their lives and working out their problems in a real world. Thus we may penetrate beyond the idealistic elements in the life of a people, into the social and economic contacts with their environment to find some of the determining elements of life and action.

From this social point of view, history has been defined as "the record of the progressive development of human society." In this progressive development, the social and economic conditions of peoples, their racial activities and physical environment are regarded as determining influences. The Church Historian is no less concerned with the place of Christians in the social structure and recognizes Christians as social beings in human relationships and in relationship to the physical world. However much their citizenship may be in heaven, yet they must live and work out their problems of existence among men and in conflict with natural forces.

2. Aim and Purpose.

It is our purpose in this study to look into the economic interests of Christians of the Roman Empire and to determine the influence these interests had upon the final outcome of the struggle between State and Church in which the Church

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1. New International Encyclopedia, Article "History."

was able to triumph at the time of Constantine. I shall endeavor to point out the part played by certain definite economic factors in the final triumph of Christianity. First, we shall see how Christian Socialism brought a unified group consciousness that caused the weak to be able to stand by the help of the strong. Second, we shall see the rapid economic decline of the Roman Empire during the third century and note how this condition of affairs gave Christianity the balance of power. Third, we shall note the growing economic power of the Church that made it attractive to Constantine as an effectively organized economic group. We shall see how this power was gained through self-sustaining individuals who, through frugality and industry gained wealth, and through a self-sustaining Church which could exist and confer benefits upon the State without State subsidy.

3. Scope.

In scope, this study shall be limited to the third and early fourth centuries of the Christian Church as it existed in the Roman Empire.

4. Importance of the Social and Economic Environment.

The way the Christian movement adjusted itself to the economic side of its environment is one of the distinctive features of Early Christianity. To understand the intensity of the economic stress in the Empire, we need only consider the general economic condition of the Empire at the time when Christianity grew up. Hatch says:

The economic condition of the Roman Empire during the

L. Hatch, S., *Organization of the Early Christian Church*, p. 32.

early centuries of the Christian era was for the most part one of intense strain. Hardly any of the elements of an unsound state of society were absent. Large tracts of country had gone out of cultivation. The capital which should have rendered them productive was employed to a great extent not in agriculture but in luxury. The absentee landlords of the great estates wasted their substance in the encouragement of debased art, in demoralizing largesses, and in the vanishing parade of official rank. The smaller landlords were crushed by the weight of an unequal and oppressive taxation. Wealth tended to accumulate in fewer hands and the lines which separated rich and poor became more and more defined, until the old distinction between citizen and foreigner, or citizen and freedmen, was merged in a new distinction between the better classes and the lower classes. The cities vied with each other in the erection of massive buildings which point the moral of the economist as to the results of wasteful expenditure.

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In the meantime, the pressure of poverty was severely felt. There grew and multiplied a new class in Graeco-Roman society - the class of paupers.¹

In this period of economic strain, Christianity developed. It is no wonder then, that we find economic factors playing a large part in their lives.

5. The Economic Interpretation of History.

It is a sordid fact that we do not like to admit that we are controlled in our acts by economic necessity. Economic necessity says thus far and no farther. It limits the fulfillment of our ideals. Besides, it has a subtle influence that changes our ideals. So in History, the economic drive has caused wars, has ground to dust the poor, has caused men and nations to lose their very souls through anxiety to accumulate wealth.

Not until the middle of the 19th century was it recognized that life is conditioned by environment and that history

1. Hatch, E., Organization of the Early Christian Church, p. 32.

is influenced by the material world of food, soil, climate and the means of subsistence. This theory was set forth by H. T. Buckle in his History of the Civilization of England, (1857). Buckle did not make these economic elements dominate all history but distinctly stated that

The advance of European civilization is characterized by a diminishing influence of physical laws and the measure of civilization is the triumph of mind over external agents.¹

Ten years previous to this, Karl Marx had already formulated his Economic Theory of History. Marx concluded that causes of the process of growth which constitutes the history of society are to be found in the economic conditions of existence. Upon this theory Marx founded his doctrine of Socialism.

Thus Economics and History are in very close relationship. Economics has been defined as

the manner in which nations or other larger or smaller communities and their individual members obtain food, clothing, shelter and whatever else is considered necessary for the maintenance and improvement of the conditions of life.²

This involves the structure and organization of the community, its history, customs, laws, institutions, economic relations between individuals and groups. The standard of living is at the basis of all economic study, including the habits and requirements of life. If we know the economic interests of individuals, classes or nations, we can tell better how in the long run they will act. Though in this study, we may not be

1. Seligman, Economic Interpretation of History, ch. I.

2. Encyclopedia Britannica, "Economics"

able to form large generalizations, we shall learn something of the operation of forces which determined the future of the Christian group in the Roman world. We shall get a fuller appreciation of the issues at stake in the third and early fourth centuries. We shall see the broad features of development which were based very largely on economic conditions.

Seligman writes on the importance of the economic life:

The existence of man depends upon his ability to sustain himself; the economic life is therefore the fundamental condition of all life. To economic causes must be traced in last instance those transformations in the structure of society which themselves condition the relations of social classes and the various manifestations of social life.¹

Karl Marx, in his Misery of Philosophy, (1847), elaborates the theory that economic institutions are historical categories and that history itself must be interpreted in the light of economic development. In this light, we shall attempt in this study to show the economic development of the Early Christian Church. Marx further says that social life at any one time is the result of an economic evolution. This too will be seen in the changing social life of the Christians as they begin to take on wealth in the third century.

After the death of Karl Marx, his theory was severely criticized because he failed to take note of other determining factors such as the legal, philosophical and religious. But Engels, his follower, still emphasized the economic theory. He says:

It is not that the economic situation is the cause

1. Seligman, op. cit., ch. I.

in the sense of being the only active agent. It is a case of mutual action on the basis of economic necessity, which in last instance always works itself out.¹

Seligman then concludes:

We understand by the economic interpretation of history, not that all history is to be explained on economic terms alone, but that the chief considerations of human progress are social considerations and that the important factor in social change is the economic factor.²

Examples of the application of this theory of history are to be seen in Cunow's articles on the "matriarchate" (1898), in which he shows how at one time marriage was not an ethical community of ideal interests but very largely an economic or labor relation. The economic causes of totemism and slavery have been studied. The economic view of the Crusades, of the Reformation, of Puritanism, and of Calvinism has been presented. The Civil War in the United States has been shown to have been a struggle between two economic forces and the Cuban insurrection as due to the sugar question.

On the truth of the theory, I quote Seligman again:

There may be other explanations for history, but the economic one is fundamental because man is still bound to the laws of nature with its struggle for existence, group against group, class against class, individual against individual. There is always the inevitable conflict between human desires and material resources. As long as this conflict endures, the primary explanation of human life must be the economic explanation. The rise and fall of nations has been largely due to economic changes.

* * * * *

The economic interpretation is a relative interpretation. It is substantially true of the past; it will tend to become less and less true of the future.³

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1. Seligman, op. cit., ch. 4.
 2. Ibid., ch. 4.
 3. Ibid., Part II, ch. V.

In this study, therefore, it is the aim and purpose to dig deeper into the real causes for the developments in the third century which led to the triumph of Christianity in the early fourth century. Recognizing the fact that there were other causes of Christianity's triumph, we limit this study to the economic factors which we believe to have been fundamental.

CHAPTER I

CHRISTIAN SOCIALISM

Just what do we mean by Christian Socialism as applied to Early Christianity? We are not to think of any movement so called. The term "Christian Socialism" did not originate until the middle of the 19th century. Then it was applied to a movement in England of which Maurice, Ludlow, and Kingsley were prominent members. Socialism as a movement began in 1817 when Robert Owen laid his scheme for a socialistic community before the committee of the House of Commons on the "Poor Law."

By the term "Christian Socialism," as applied to the Early Christians we mean rather certain attitudes and practices in the Christian social economy which, in our present day terminology, may be termed socialistic. Adolf Held says that:

We may define as socialistic every tendency which demands the subordination of the individual will to the community.¹

Janet more precisely defines Socialism as follows:

We call Socialism every doctrine which teaches that the State has a right to correct the inequality of wealth which exists among men, and to legally establish the balance by taking from those who have too much in order to give to those who have not enough.²

Laveleye explains Socialism thus:

In the first place, every socialistic doctrine aims

1. Kirkup, T., History of Socialism, 1913, p. 5.

2. Janet, Les Origines du Socialisme Contemporaine, p. 67.

at introducing greater equality in social conditions; and in the second place at realizing those reforms by the law or the State.¹

Maurice, defining the movement still further, says:

Socialism is the attempt to bring God's government into the corporate life. The watchword of the Socialist is cooperation. Anyone who recognizes the principle of cooperation as a stronger and truer principle than that of competition has the right to the honor or the disgrace of being called a Socialist.²

In the light of these definitions of Socialism, we may call the Early Christian attitudes toward poverty and wealth socialistic. In the alleviation of poverty and the use of wealth for the common good, we have both cooperation and equalization. While not by the law of the State was compulsion brought to bear, yet the higher law of God and of human brotherhood demanded this attitude and action on the part of Christians. The wiping out of class distinctions, along with the other means of equalization, brought unity within the group until they considered themselves a "Third Race" distinct from Jew and Gentile, yet ready to welcome them.

These socialistic qualities of cooperation, equalization and unification enabled the Christian group to endure hard times as well as good times, times of persecution and of economic difficulty as well as eras of peace and prosperity. This economic cooperation was an important factor in the growth leading up to the final triumph.

Socialism is often thought of as radical and revolutionary. To be sure, the Early Christian Movement was also so

1. Laveleye, *Le Socialisme Contemporaine*, p. iv.

2. Raven, C. E., *Christian Socialism*, 1920, p. 156.

regarded in its time. To quote Healey:

But Christianity was something more than the worship of a new God. It was a new scheme of life. It was a revolution of the social order.¹

We shall endeavor to determine some of the elements of Early Christian Socialism which were determining factors in the phenomenal growth of this new social order.

1. Poverty and its Amelioration.

The Christian Church, from the earliest times of its existence found itself in the midst of poverty. At the very beginning, Jesus declares his attitude toward the poor who were all about him. The Church at Jerusalem needed to provide for the poor of its own numbers. The Pauline Churches often sent alms to their poorer brethren at Jerusalem. Then with the growing poverty of the Empire, the care of the poor became a distinguishing feature of the Christian associations. Almsgiving was part of the essence of Christianity.² St. Chrysostom says (Homily 32) "There is no characteristic of the Christian as great as ἐλεημοσύνη."

The gospel itself as preached throughout the Gentile world was a gospel for the poor, a gospel of love and charity. Jesus in his teachings had laid great stress on the giving of alms to the poor. The parables of Jesus teaching charity are especially numerous. So also many a story of his life. He made position in the Kingdom conditional upon the treatment of

1. Healey, P. J., The Valerian Persecution, p. 20.

2. Harnack, A., The Mission and Expansion of Christianity in the First Three Centuries, Vol. 1. "On Love and Charity."

the needy.

For I was hungry, and ye gave me to eat; I was thirsty, and ye gave me to drink; I was a stranger, and ye took me in; naked and ye clothed me; I was sick and ye visited me; I was in prison, and ye came unto me.

* * * * *

Inasmuch as ye did it unto one of these my brethren, even these least, ye did it unto me.¹

The motive for these acts of kindness that Jesus taught was love. Love for God was expressed by loving deeds to their fellowmen. Tertullian says:

It is our care for the helpless, our practice of loving kindness, that brands us in the eyes of many of our opponents. 'Only look,' they say, 'look how they love one another' (they themselves being given to mutual hatred). 'Look how they are prepared to die for one another!' (they, themselves being readier to kill each other.)²

Thus we see that the gospel of Jesus was a social gospel, in which each one is to think not of his own but of another's good. This might be called a voluntary Socialism in which each makes himself the keeper of his brother.

We are not to suppose that this high motive was dominant in all who gave to charity. The more selfish motives of self-interest and the buying of merit or even of salvation is also to be found. Clement of Rome writes:

Fasting is better than prayer, almsgiving is better than fasting: blessed is the man who is found perfect therein, for almsgiving lightens the weight of sin.³

This lack of altruistic motive did not, however, lessen the social effect. Rather it tended to make almsgiving more common

1. Matt. 25: 35, 36, 40b.

2. Quoted by Harnack, Miss. and Exp. Vol. I, On Love and Charity.

3. Ibid.

common and more attractive to those who had means. It was as J. B. Bury says,

for the benefit of the giver's soul and to obtain the prayers of the recipients who, just because they happened to be poor, were supposed to be not far from the kingdom of heaven.¹

St. Chrysostom, speaking of this motive for almsgiving, says:

"It is medicine for our sins."² St. Polycarp calls the widows, orphans and the poor of the Christian community a *Θυσιαστήριον*, an altar of sacrifice. They were in the new economy, what the great altar of the Temple Court had been in the older economy. Just as the new temple of God was the temple of the regenerate soul, so the new altar of God was the altar of human need. That which was given "to the least of the little ones" was given to God, but with the idea many times of winning merit rather than out of love. Cyprian, in the third century, developed almsgiving into a formal means of grace, the only one after baptism. By this means, Christians hoped to gain religious position and future recompense.³

Poverty itself was considered bad, as Clement of Alexandria bears witness:

It compels the soul to desist from necessary things. I mean contemplation and from pure sinlessness, forcing him who has not wholly dedicated himself to God in love, to occupy himself about provisions; as again, health and abundance of necessities keep the soul free and unimpeded, and capable of making a good use of what is at hand.⁴

As has been pointed out before, the pressure of poverty

1. Bury, J. B., Hist. of Later Roman Empire, p. 22.

2. Homily 6.

3. Hatch, E., Organization of the Early Church, p. 40.

4. Strom. IV vi.

was severely felt in the Roman Empire. Nor were the Christians alone in seeking to alleviate this poverty. Large sums were expended in annual doles of food to the poor. The Emperor Trajan (98-117) had established in Italy a great system for the maintenance and education of poor children. During his reign a lady, Caelia Macrina of Tarracina, on the death of her son donated a million sesterces from the interest of which 100 boys and girls were to be supported. The Younger Pliny founded a boarding establishment in his native city of Comum, which was to receive the annual income of an estate valued at 500,000 sesterces and devote it to the nourishing of poor children.¹ Other Emperors and rich men followed their example.

Among those who were the objects of the charity of the Church may especially be noted the widows and orphans. "The Roman Church," wrote Bishop Cornelius in the middle of the third century, "supports 1500 widows and poor persons." Lucian, the pagan, of earlier date, was aware that Christians attended first to their orphans and widows. The definition of pure religion given by James, "to visit the widows and the fatherless in their affliction" was being practiced. As Christianity grew in numbers, the number of widows increased. Virginity was looked upon with favor and the second marriage of a widow was especially discountenanced. Many of the orphan girls who would have married, remained the charges of the Church. Dionysius, the Bishop of Corinth about 170 A. D., extols the Church of Rome for its abundant liberality, as follows:

1. Kautsky, K., Foundations of Christianity, 1925, p. 150.

For this is your practice from the beginning, to do good to all the brethren in various ways, and to send contributions to many churches in every city, thus refreshing the poverty of those in need and furnishing supplies to the brethren in the mines.¹

Also the sick, the infirm, the disabled, called for the attention of the Church. Where cures could not be effected, the Church was bound to support the patient by consolation, visitation and charitable gifts. Such was the solidarity of the Christian brotherhood that those who were able felt the duty of supporting those who were not able. According to Clement of Alexandria: "It is monstrous for one to live in luxury while many are in want."² Nevertheless, care was taken not to give charitable distributions to anyone who was given to gluttony, drunkenness and idleness, according to the Apostolic Constitutions, Chapter 4.

Prisoners also received the charitable attentions of the Church. Many Christians fell into prison for their faith or for debt. They had to be visited and consoled and their plight alleviated. This often required great risks, especially during times of persecution. Those who were sentenced to the mines were looked after and efforts made for securing their release. Licinius passed a law to the effect that no one was to show kindness to anyone in prison by supplying them food. The ransoming of prisoners was regarded as a work especially noble and pleasing to God. Lucian (c 165-170) bears witness to

1. Quoted by Orr, James, Neglected Factors in the Study of the Early Progress of Christianity, p. 130.

2. Paed II xiii.

the Christian interest in prisoners in his "De Morte Peregrini":

When Peregrinus was imprisoned, the Christians, taking the matter to heart, left no stone unturned in the endeavor to rescue him. Then, when this was found to be impossible, they looked after his wants in every other respect with unremitting care and zeal. And from the first break of day, old women - widows they are called - and orphan children might be seen waiting about the doors of the prison; while their officers, by bribing the keepers succeeded in passing the night inside with him. Then various meals were brought in, and sacred formulas of theirs were repeated; and this fine fellow Peregrinus - for he still bore this name - was entitled a new Socrates by them.

Moreover, there came from certain of the cities in Asia, deputies sent by the Christian communities to assist and advise and console the man. Indeed the alacrity they display is incredible, when any matter of the kind is undertaken as a matter of public concern; for in short they spare nothing. Accordingly large sums of money came to Peregrinus at that time from them, on the plea of his bonds, and he made no inconsiderable revenue out of it. For the poor wretches have persuaded themselves that they will be altogether immortal and will live forever, and with this end in view, they actually despise death and the greater part of them give themselves up voluntarily.¹

Such is an example of relief work for prisoners which during the persecutions was very necessary and very common.

The slaves formed another class that received the attention of our Early Christian Socialists. The giving of freedom to slaves was looked upon as a generous act to gain merit.² The Apostolic Constitutions speak of purchasing the freedom of a slave and saving a soul as one.³ Slaves were often mistreated.

1. Lucian: De Morte Peregrini. Lightfoot, J. B., Apostolic Fathers, Vol. II, p. 345 sq.

2. Allard, P., The Slave and Christianity.

3. Apostolic Constitutions, Ante-Nicene Fathers, Vol. 7, p. 425.

They were looked upon as inferiors. But Christianity made no distinction of rank between slave and free. They were allowed to share the rights of Church membership even to becoming clergymen and bishops. This was a revolutionary practice according to the ideas of the time. These slaves were mostly war captives sold into slavery. Kidnapping also furnished many slaves. In the slave markets all nations became known for their good or bad characteristics. On the whole they were not of inferior race. Christianity, though it could not abolish slavery, did do much to alleviate their sufferings. Naturally, great numbers of slaves became Christians.

Hospitality for brethren on a journey also formed an important part of the charitable work of the Church. Travel was very common in the Roman Empire in this period. So Christians often found themselves away from home on commercial trips and other enterprises.¹ In this way the Christian congregations were closely connected with each other. A member arriving from another town was given work by the congregation if he wished to stay; if he wished to travel further, he was given an expense mite.²

Out of this great need for Christian charity, it was only natural that some organization should grow up. In the Jerusalem Church, the seven deacons were appointed to look after the distribution of alms. Later in the associations formed among Christians in the Roman State, these duties were assigned

1. Harnack, A., Miss. and Exp. Vol. 1 "On Love and Charity."

2. Kautsky, K., Foundations of Christianity, 1925, p. 416.

to officers who had the work in charge. Hatch says:

The form of organization of the Christian society was determined largely by its practical uses in the distribution of alms. It is clear that in communities which grew up under such circumstances, and in which the eleemosynary element was so prominent, the officer of administration and finance must have had an important place. The name of the officer was taken from that of a similar officer in non-Christian associations. The word ἐπιμελητής was used to designate a superintendent or commissioner. The more enduring word ἐπίσκοπος has come down to us in the English word Bishop.

There seems to have been a committee of elders also known as πρεσβύτεροι whose special duty was the administration of Church funds. Later there came to be one officer who came to monopolize the name of Bishop which referred to his financial and administrative functions.¹

Hatch thinks that the secret of this lies in the fact that gifts were received and dispensed publicly in such a way as to make the president the central figure in the whole charitable program of the Church. Thus the receiving and dispensing of alms was made to have a solemn meaning in the Church. Gifts were placed upon the Lord's table and blessed by the Bishop. Thus they were given to God and from God were received by those in need. The Bishop decided who were to be the recipients and the deacons bore the alms to those who were to receive them. They also sought out cases of need outside the Church and administered relief.

We may ask, what was the effect of this organized charity upon the growth of the Church? The Church grew up in the midst of poverty with a distinct message for the poor. It was

1. Hatch, E., Organization of the Early Christian Church.

a message that caused the poor to see in themselves the true aristocracy of the Kingdom of God. It was a message that required work of all who were able to work but assured sustenance to those who were not able to work. Thus it assured a large measure of economic safety in an age when there was often dire want. Naturally the poor flowed into the Christian groups. Christianity, through its deeds of mercy became a great drawing power in the Roman world for all who were in need. By lifting up the fallen, the whole group was strengthened. The uplifting of the submerged tenth has been a problem for modern Socialists, which Early Christianity solved through brotherly love, charity and organized employment.

2. Wealth, Its Use and Distribution.

Socialism has always regarded accumulated wealth with disfavor and has sought a more equable distribution. This was also the Christian attitude in the early centuries, except that instead of appealing to the authority of the State the Christians appealed to the authority of God and the fear of eternal punishment.

The attitude of the Early Christians toward wealth is seen to be another vital though changing economic attitude. The problem of their relations to the rich was a conditioning factor in this attitude. It was only natural that the great mass of poor in the early Church of the first and second centuries should hate the rich and their wealth. Riches were thought of as conducive to luxury and sin - therefore in themselves evil. The teachings of Jesus had been against the

possession of wealth. He had told the rich young ruler to go, sell all and give to the poor. His story of the rich man and Lazarus was a thrust at the rich and their selfish luxury.

So it was that the Christians of the first century were indifferent to wealth. They preferred to have all things common. The expectation of the world's end was one of the motives for this attitude. Poverty was thought of as fitting, while wealth was depreciated. Even in the second century, Christians were cautious of wealth. Possession of much of this world's goods was objected to because it tended to divert the mind from spiritual affairs. Poverty continued to be held as the Christian idea of simplicity even down to the time of Constantine. So it was that Christians deprecated luxury and took a stand against all unnecessary jewels and other adornment. The Shepherd of Hermas in the second century describes the attitude of the true prophet thus:

First, he that hath the Divine Spirit which is from above is meek and peaceable and lowly, and refraineth himself from every wickedness and vain desire of this world, and he maketh himself more needy than all men, and answereth nothing to any when enquired of and speaketh not solitarily, neither when a man would speak doth the Holy Spirit speak; but when God willeth that he should speak, then he speaketh.

12. First the man thinketh that he hath the Spirit and exalteth himself, and wisheth to have the pre-eminence, and straightway he is heady and shameless and full of talk and conversant among many luxuries and deceits; and he receiveth hire for his prophecy, and if he receive not he prophesieth not. Can a divine Spirit receive hire and prophecy? It cannot be that the prophet of God should do this but the spirit of such prophets is earthly.¹

1. Hermas, Mandate XI 8.

Didache also points a warning finger at wealth:

The way of death - greediness, not pitying the poor man, not laboring for the afflicted..... turning away from him that is in want, afflicting him that is distressed, advocates of the rich, lawless judges of the poor, utter sinners, Be delivered, children from all these.¹

The attitude of Christians toward wealth in the third century is shown in somewhat different light in the treatise of Clement of Alexandria on the "Salvation of the Rich Man." He says that some rich men lose all hope of salvation, while others do not care. The treatise is based on the story of the rich young ruler. "How hardly shall they that have riches enter the kingdom." The young man is to banish from his mind the desire for possessions though it is useful to have possessions if they are used rightly. The Savior does not exclude the rich man if he is willing. The rich man can exchange some of his wealth for salvation by giving some of it to the poor. He can even be saved if he does not trust in riches. His wealth is to be used in the service of God. Clement advises the rich man to keep a man of God as a check on his conduct. In Clement we do not see the radical abhorrence of the rich man and his wealth but rather a conciliatory attitude which represents growth from the early abhorrence toward the later attitude when the Church itself became wealthy.²

On the whole, Clement of Alexandria views wealth in a sane and utilitarian way. Wealth is for use. He strongly

1. Didache, ch. 5.

2. Davis, W. S., The Influence of Wealth in Imperial Rome.

deprecates luxury and the superfluous:

For it were not seemly that we, after the fashion of the rich man's son in the gospel should as prodigals, abuse the Father's gifts; but we should use them, without undue attachment to them, as having command over ourselves.¹

On costly vessels he says:

And so the use of cups made of silver and gold, and others inlaid with precious stones, is out of place, being only a deception of the vision.For on the whole gold and silver, both publicly and privately are an invidious possession when they exceed what is necessary, seldom to be acquired, difficult to keep, and not adapted for use..... And silver couches, and pans and vinegar-saucers and trenchers and bowls; and besides these, vessels of silver and gold tripods fashioned of ivory and couches with silver feet, and inlaid with ivory cunning devices of envy and effeminacy, are all to be relinquished, as having nothing whatever worth our pains.²

Further on the use of wealth:

Riches are then to be partaken of rationally, bestowed lovingly, not sordidly, or pompously; nor is the love of the beautiful to be turned into self-love and ostentation; lest perchance someone say to us, "his house, or land, or domestic, or gold is worth 15 talents; but the man is dear at three coppers."

The best of maxims then, ought to be perpetually repeated; that the good man, being temperate and just, treasures up his wealth in heaven. He who has sold his worldly goods and given to the poor, finds the imperishable treasure, "where is neither moth nor robber"..... he is truly rich with the greatest of all riches.

And it is not jewels, or gold, or clothing, or beauty of person, that is of high value but virtue..... for "wisdom is better than precious stones, nor is anything that is valuable equal to her." And again, "Acquire me rather than gold,

1. Paed. I, 1, Ante Nicene Fathers Library, Vol. 2, p. 239.

2. Ibid., II, iii, p. 246.

and precious stones and silver; for my produce
is better than choice silver." (Prov. 8:19)
* * * * *

For there are those who sow and reap more, of
whom it is written, "He hath dispersed, he hath
given to the poor, his righteousness endureth
forever." (Ps. 112:9) So it is not he who keeps,
but he who gives away, that is rich; and it is
giving away, not possession, that renders a man
happy;It is in the soul then that
riches are.
* * * * *

The things which are useful are preferable,
and consequently cheap things are better than
dear. In fine, wealth, when not properly governed
is a stronghold of evil, about which many cast-
ing their eyes, they will never reach the kingdom
of heaven, sick with the things of the world
and living proudly through luxury. But those
who are in earnest about salvation must settle
this before hand in their mind, that all that
we have is given us for use, and use for sufficiency,
which we may attain to by few things. For silly
are they who, from greed, take delight in that
which they have hoarded up;

Such is the attitude of Clement of Alexandria toward wealth, a
sane, utilitarian view that permitted wealth for use.

With the growing wealth of Christians, they were being
influenced by tendencies to luxury by the time Clement wrote.
A social evolution had taken place. Great demands had been
made upon the old aristocratic families to keep up the pomp
and show of their rank, until they were reduced to financial
distress. Then a new aristocracy of thrifty craftsmen and
traders among whom were many Christians, came to take its place.
With the decline of the Empire, the old aristocracy disappeared.
Freedmen got money and power and Christians became the most

1. Paed. III, vi, A. N. F. L. Vol. 2

2. Ibid., II iii, A. N. F. L. Vol. 2, p. 248.

wealthy part of society. Cyprian, Bishop of Carthage, himself a man of wealth and education, writing about the middle of the third century, portrays the temptations of wealth for the Christian of his time;

Everyone was applying himself to the increase of wealth; and forgetting both what was the conduct of believers under the Apostles and what ought to be their conduct in every age, they with insatiable eagerness for gain, devoted themselves to the multiplying of possessions..... Numerous bishops who ought to be an encouragement and example to others, despising their sacred calling, engaged themselves in secular vocations, relinquished their chair, deserted their people, strayed among foreign provinces, hunted the markets for mercantile profits; tried to amass large sums of money, while they had brethren starving within the church, took possession of estates by fraudulent proceedings and multiplied their gains by accumulated usuries.¹

While Cyprian is writing only of the lapsed, yet this statement shows the opportunities of Christians to get wealth and the temptations to forsake their former ideal of the use of wealth for the common good of all.

In this social revolution, we see a changing attitude toward wealth on the part of Christians from indifference to approval and possession. Private property was regarded as lawful by Christians in general. Its rights were scrupulously respected. But excessive accumulations were regarded with disfavor.²

In the possession of property, Christians regarded God as the owner of all. Man was only the steward of God's affairs

1. Cyprian: De Lapsis sec. 6. in Kidd, B. J., Doc. Illust. of Church History, Vol. I, p. 183.

2. Benigni, U., Storia Sociale Della Chiesa, p. 371, Vol. I.

here on earth. The Jews had recognized God as the supreme overlord. Christians never gave up the idea of a God-ruled society. All that man has is entrusted to him in stewardship. Property is accepted with regard to the rights of fellowmen. In the second century, charity is enjoined on the rich, which makes men richer in heavenly treasures. In the stewardship idea, Christians found an apologetic for the possession of wealth in the third century which the first century Christian would have abhorred for fear of losing his soul.¹

So it was that by the third century, there came to be in the church great numbers of wealthy people, people who had become wealthy and those who, being already wealthy, were attracted to the Church. The Christian agitators offered the rich a convenient way of attaining eternal bliss without serious privations in this life, in the bequest of property which might purchase their eternal salvation. Thus they captured the young passionate aristocrats through their disgust for the life they had led and they captured the exhausted old rich men through their fear of death and the pangs of hell awaiting them. Efforts were also made to recruit rich persons while they were still alive for the support of the congregation, even if such persons were unwilling to carry out strictly the Lord's commandment to distribute among the poor all they possessed. The more the charity phase was emphasized, the stronger became the tendency to soften the hatred of the rich and to enable them to feel at home in the congregation although they remained

1. Troeltsch, E., Property, Its Duties and Rights.

rich and clung to their possessions.¹

Dionysius, a wealthy man of the Church enumerated among the sufferings he endured for Christianity in the reign of Decius (249-251):

Sentences, confiscations, proscriptions, seizure of goods, loss of dignities, contempt of worldly glory, scorn of praise from governors and councillors.²

This statement shows him to have been a man of possessions, one of the well-to-do of the rising Christian aristocracy.

Why this changing attitude toward wealth? The failure of the chiliastic prophecy had the effect of turning attention from other-worldliness to the affairs of this world. The taking over of the Hebrew Scriptures with their emphasis upon prosperity as the blessing of God was another factor in bringing wealth into favor. More perhaps, than either of the foregoing, was the disposition of the Christian group to adapt itself to its environment. Beginning with almsgiving, the need for work and the acquiring of wealth was felt. Then it became necessary for the worker to accumulate capital that he might engage in business to earn more money for alms. By natural growth and adaptation, the possession of wealth came to have general approval through the idea of Christian stewardship. But even in times of greatest prosperity, Christians were constantly reminded of the socialistic principle that wealth must be used for the common good or it would become a curse to their souls.

1. Kautsky, K., Foundations of Christianity, p. 418.
 2. Harnack, A., Miss. and Exp. Vol. 2, p. 39.

3. Equalization

Next we take up the socialistic principle of equalization. This is to some extent foreshadowed in the treatment of poverty and wealth but will be treated here more specifically. "The pre-Constantine writers," says Benigni, "affirm that before God all men are equal - that for Him there exists no distinction between rich and poor, but only by virtue or the lack of virtue, as Minucius Felix has said to Octavius, 'Omnes pari sorte nascimur, sola virtute distinguimur.'"¹

Lactantius says that virtue is comprehended in two qualities - piety and equity. Piety is the recognition of God. Equity consists in adjusting one's self to others, which is to make oneself equal to his neighbors. To quote from Lactantius:

None to Him (that is God) is master or servant but He is Father to all; with Him none is poor or rich but only concerning virtue does He make distinction.²

The Apostolic Canons contain the statement:

Of no value is riches in the presence of God, nor does dignity prevail, nor youth, nor beauty, but there exists an equality of all before Him.³

Pöhlmann says:

The story of the manna in the time of Moses, where he who gathered much had nothing over and he who gathered little had no lack is the story in which the social ideal of equality of possessions is shown.

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1. Benigni, U., La Storia Sociale della Chiesa, p. 362.
quotation from "Octavius" XXXVII
 2. Lactantius, Div. Inst. V, xv.
 3. Apostolic Canons XIII 1.
 4. Pöhlmann, Robert, Geschichte des Antiken Kommunismus und Sozialismus. München, 1893, Vol. 2, ch. 7.

On the subject of equalization, Clement of Alexandria, gives us the following statement:

God brought our race into communion by first imparting what was His own, when He gave His own Word, common to all, and made all things for all. All things therefore are common and not for the rich to appropriate an undue share. That expression, therefore, 'I possess and possess in abundance, why should I not enjoy?' is suitable neither to the man, nor to society. But more worthy of love is that: 'I have: why should I not give to those who have need?' For such an one - one who fulfils the command, 'Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself' - is perfect.¹

A criterion therefore based on natural equality indicated the duty to give what is superfluous to those who lack the necessities, because it would be inhuman for one to have more than his material needs while another had not even the necessities.

The idea of equality was applied also to the wiping out of class distinctions between master and slave. As members of the Christian Church slaves were regarded as the brothers of their masters and on an equality with them. This both improved the condition of slaves and promoted to some degree the decrease of slavery and an increase in the frequency of emancipation.² This phase of equalization, although revolutionary, drew many slaves into the Church and established a contact with the Stoic philosophy which also regarded all men as brothers.

For the final equalization, Christians looked forward to the establishment by divine intervention of the Kingdom of

1. Paed II xiii A. N. F. L. p. 268, Vol. 2.

2. Bury, J. B., History of the Later Roman Empire, 1889, p. 22.

God on earth. Those who had suffered poverty would have plenty. This principle was applied by the early Christians preachers to both the social and economic spheres. The parable of the rich man and Lazarus is a story of the future equalization which they expected. This idea of equalization was valuable in that it gave the common man a faith in himself and his future. But the failure of the chiliastic idea did not hinder the application of the principle of equalization to the congregations of the church. For the Christian Church regarded it as a duty to see that its poorest members had no lack and that those who were able to work should provide for those who were unable. Thus the principle of economic equalization was practiced. Social equalization as well is to be noted in the meeting on an equal basis in the congregation of rich and poor, slave and free, high and low.

4. Communism.

Finally we take up what is perhaps the most radical socialistic principle when fully applied - communism. It was a principle, however, which failed of universal application. In the church at Jerusalem, there was an attempt at communism in which for a time "all lived together with gladness and had all things common. And those who had lands sold them and laid the price at the Apostles' feet." This Utopian vision was spoken of with favor in the third century by Cyprian, and Chrysostom in the fourth century spoke of them as "a community of angels because they had nothing their own." Pöhlmann thinks that early Christians had the idea of a communistic state that the returning

Savior was to set up on earth, a kind of "Heaven on Earth," a "Communistie Paradise." But with the failure of the Lord to return, and the failure of early communistie attempts, the dream faded and each individual was forced to strive for his own economic support. However, some communistie elements persisted. They still brought their contributions and laid them at the feet of the Bishop who in turn distributed to such as had need. They still met for the common meal, which remained the firm bond uniting all the members. The common meal satisfied the daily needs of every member. It was the center about which the entire life of the congregation revolved. Later in the second century, the meal for the poorer members was detached from the symbolic meal for the entire congregation.¹ In the fourth century the meal was discontinued entirely and charity took its place.

The idea of communism seems to have been retained theoretically until late in the second century. Tertullian writes:

We who feel ourselves united heart and soul, have no difficulty about community of goods; with us all is common except our wives; the community ceases there, where alone others practice it.²

There were many hindrances to the fullest application of communism by the Christian groups. Because of persecution they had to exist secretly. This prevented community dwellings as discovery would have been an easy matter.³ When it was

1. Kautsky, K., *op. cit.*, p. 422.

2. Quoted in Harnack: *op. cit.*, Vol. 1, pp. 189-190.

3. Kautsky, *Ibid.*, p. 412.

based solely upon a communism of consumption, those who had property worth selling soon ran out. Then they had to bring in their earnings. To earn, they must have property in the means of production for weavers, potters, smiths or in stock of goods in case of shopkeepers and peddlers. They could not arrange communistic work shops. So they had to abandon communism in means of production and accept the principle of private property. The fact that the Early Christian congregations were principally urban was a further obstacle to Communism.¹ Most successful later attempts have been in the open country where both production and consumption could be freely administered by the community.

However, as an ideal, communism did not die out but was practiced in Christian liberality. The Christian group was united by the bonds of brotherly love to the extent that no one called his possession his own if the Church had need of it to help the less fortunate.

Conclusion.

In what way then may we say that Christian Socialism was a factor in the triumph of Early Christianity? These socialistic principles welded the Christian group into a united whole so that the strong supported the weak and all were able to stand together- an early working out of the principle, "United we stand, divided we fall." Thus Christianity became a religion adapted to times of adversity as well as for times of prosperity

1. Kautsky, op. cit., p. 464.

Besides, these socialistic principles constituted a great drawing power for Christianity. For the Poor found consolation for their poverty in a future hope as well as in present relief, and the rich found in Christianity an opportunity to invest their wealth in heavenly treasures.

In this closely knit economic and social unity that amounted almost to communism, we see a determining factor in the growing strength of the Christian group. Through the application of the principles of cooperation and equalization, they were able to become the most prosperous and powerful economic group in the Empire by the time of Constantine.

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CHAPTER II

THE DECLINING PROSPERITY OF THE EMPIRE IN THE THIRD CENTURY

The social and economic environment of Early Christianity is of utmost importance for one who would understand the phenomenal growth of this new religion. Progress or delay of a movement is conditioned by the opportunities found at hand. A new movement may be crushed by unfavorable circumstances or rushed on to success by forces that can scarcely be understood. Environment is the soil upon which the new movement may flourish and bear fruit or wither and die for lack of nourishment.

Again, when we speak of the triumph of Christianity, a struggle is presupposed. A struggle with whom, we might ask. It was primarily a struggle with the state for recognition and the right to exist. In any struggle there is a certain balance which, when it is disturbed, makes the disadvantage of one side the advantage of the other, so that with the turn of the balance victory is assured to the fortunate side. In the critical times of the third century, Christianity was struggling to the fore. The Church was gaining in economic and social importance. While at the same time the Roman Empire was growing less and less prosperous, making the gains of the Church count for more in comparison to the growing poverty and chaos all about - just as a light shines brighter on a very dark night than it would in broad day. In this declining prosperity

of the Roman Empire in the third century, we see the second economic factor in the triumph of Early Christianity.

The dark picture of the third century Empire will be shown even more darkly in the light of the "glory that was Rome" in the first and second centuries of our era. The constitution which Augustus gave the Roman State went on developing for at least two centuries on the lines which he had originally laid down. A new era in the history of the ancient world had begun - an era of peace and prosperity hitherto unknown - an era which we may call the age of the Roman Empire.¹ The creation of a central authority, upholding peace and intercourse, the uniting of the different parts of the world into one economic system enlivened by free trade, the spread of citizenship and civil culture in wider and wider circles of population - all these benefits produced for a time an unprecedented rise in prosperity.² While the expansion of Roman civilization was in progress, industry thrived and developed. The provinces were gradually industrialized. Commerce was carried on with greatest freedom. A great circuit of industrial and commercial intercourse was formed under the protection of the Empire. The different provinces exchanged goods and developed specialties fitting into one whole through mutual support. The excellent roads made quick exchanges possible.

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1. Rostovtzeff, M., Social and Economic History of the Roman Empire, Oxford, 1926. p. 38.
 2. Cambridge Medieval History, Vol. 1, Macmillan, 1911. p. 544.

Considerable capital sought employment in productive enterprises. Firm political power and mutual confidence fostered the growth of credit.¹ Thus the second century came to be an age of rich or well-to-do men, distributed all over the Empire, large capitalists who very often dominated the social life of their cities and were known to everyone not only in the city but throughout the district or even throughout the whole province. Their wealth, it seems, was derived from commerce. Money gained in this way was increased by lending it out on mortgage or by investing it in land. Some fortunes were undoubtedly made also in transportation. The richest cities, where the most wealthy men lived were those that had the most developed commerce and lay near the sea on great trade-routes, or were the centers of a lively river traffic.²

All went well so long as peace could be maintained. But the foundations upon which this apparent prosperity of the state rested were very unstable. Rostovtzeff says:

The fact that every serious war brought the whole fabric of the Empire to the verge of ruin proves that the measures taken by the Emperors to strengthen its foundations were fruitless or at least powerless to neutralize other factors which undermined it.³

From the beginning of the third century onward, economic decline was in progress. The safety and security that promoted commerce gave way to chaos. Prosperity and confidence were vanishing. Yet Christianity was able in the midst of these hard times to

1. Cambridge Medieval History, Vol. 1, p. 547.

2. Rostovtzeff, M., op. cit., p. 145 ff.

3. Ibid., p. 327.

make rapid advances, so that the economic decline seemed to accelerate rather than to retard its growth. At the same time the Empire came more and more to need what Christianity had to offer. I shall now point out some of the aspects of this declining prosperity of the Empire that gave the growing Church the balance of power in the time of Constantine, and show how the forces which weakened the Empire strengthened the Church.

1. Political Disorder.

Westermann says that it is certain that the breaking up of the ancient economic and intellectual order of society was due to causes within the Roman Empire.¹ Of these internal reactions, the prevailing political disorder of the third century was the most disastrous. A series of political misfortunes set in rather rapidly in the third century. Invasions of barbarians, conflicts between rival candidates to the throne, competition between armies and provinces put an end to order and prosperity and threatened the very existence of the Empire. Usurpers, riotous soldiers and brigands gathered strength from national aspirations and in the end the disruption of the Empire became inevitable on account of internal strife.²

This era of political disorder was initiated when Marcus Aurelius in 177 A. D. made his son Commodus his associate. In 180, Marcus Aurelius died, leaving Commodus, aged 18 years as Emperor. He had neither the age nor the preparation necessary to fill his difficult place. He had conflict with the

1. Westermann, W. L., The Economic Basis of the Decline of Western Culture. American Historical Review, July, 1915. Cont.

Senate and the Senate was unable at his death to elect his successor. The succession gave rise to a severe civil war which ended in the establishment of the military despotism of Septimius Severus.¹ From Commodus to Diocletian, there was little stability in the Roman government.

This lack of stability politically rests upon the failure of the power of the Senate to command recognition. The Senate, during the Empire, had the power of electing the Emperor. By the sanction of the Senate the legitimacy of the Emperor was established. This constituted the only continuous authority in the Empire. When the Senate failed in the succession following Commodus, the period of chaos set in. Septimius Severus established his military monarchy on the ruins of the Senate. He was an African by birth, of recent nobility, hellenized and romanized, not without being strongly influenced by Asiatic Orientalism. With such a background, he was not the man to respect the senatorial authority.²

With the usurpation of Septimius Severus, the army had control. He received his power from the soldiers and retained it as long as they were willing to support him. The military rule of Septimius Severus, of his Oriental wife and of his half-Oriental children is of high importance in the history of the Roman Empire. He is said to be the first to break with the traditions of the Antonines and to start on the path of

Cont. from preceding page. 2. Cambridge Medieval Hist. Vol.1, pp 544-46.

1. Ferrero, G., La ruine de la civilisation antique. Paris, 1921, p. 31.

2. Ibid., p. 31.

thoroughly barbarizing the Roman Empire.¹

Concessions were given to the soldiers. Their pay was increased. Veterans were exempted from municipal liturgies. Club life in the fortresses was protected. Marriage of soldiers was made legal. The last words of Septimius Severus to his successor were, "Be united, enrich the soldiers, and scorn the rest." To support this program, it was necessary for Septimius to take radical and ruthless measures in taxation. Following Commodus who was most extravagant and following the civil war at the beginning of his reign, he found the imperial finances in desperate condition. Money acquired by confiscations and contributions was spent lavishly in bribing the soldiers and the Roman mob. The finances of the state were restored but at the expense of the people. The reign of Septimius Severus was not a reign of peace and prosperity.²

Caracalla likewise based his power upon the soldiers. To corrupt the soldiers he needed vast sums. The money accumulated by Septimius Severus was soon gone and he had to resort to extraordinary measures. His income was chiefly gained from a systematic draining of the wealth of the propertied classes. No doubt it was this same hostility to the upper classes that caused him to issue in 212 the edict which granted Roman citizenship to all "peregrini." He thus enlarged the number subject to the city liturgies.³ The army had come to be composed of the lower classes who had never shared in the civilized life of

1. Rostovtzeff, M., op. cit., p. 352.

2. Ibid., p. 362.

3. Ibid., p. 369.

the cities. It was only natural that this army should in the end seek to realize the ambitions of the lower classes. So the watchword of the army was, "Away with the privileges of the higher classes." What it wanted, was an equal share in the management of the Empire, a thorough levelling. As far as this negative side of its program was concerned, the struggle was crowned with success. The bourgeoisie were terrified and decimated. The cities were brought to the verge of ruin. The new rulers, both Emperors and officials, sprang mostly from the peasant class.¹

The reigns of Caracalla, Elgabalus and Alexander Severus were times of great misery for the Empire. The organism of the Empire was exhausted, to such an extent that it was unable to stand the strain of the serious external wars which threatened it. The main problem was how to meet the expense of the great campaigns. The experiments of Caracalla and Alexander failed because the Roman Empire was too poor to bear the cost of such a colossal enterprise. Both plundered the Empire. The enrichment of the state at the expense of private fortunes resulted not in enrichment but in the impoverishment of the Empire.² The heavier the pressure of the state upon the upper classes, the more intolerable became the condition of the lower.³

In 235 A. D. when Alexander Severus was killed, a period of military anarchy began which lasted for fifty years and

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1. Rostovtzeff, M., op. cit., p. 451.
 2. Ibid., p. 373.
 3. Ibid., p. 379.

was even more disastrous than the military monarchy. At the beginning of this period, ancient civilization was still intact. The fine arts, sculpture, painting, architecture still flourished. The finances of the Empire and the cities were not yet in such bad condition and the army was yet strong enough to impose upon barbarians respect for the Roman name.¹ Fifty years later all this was changed. Religion was in decay. The aristocracies who governed the Empire with such magnificence and justice had disappeared. The Empire was the prey of a despotism at the same time feeble and violent which recruited its civil and military personnel among the most barbarous population of the Empire. The provinces of the West, Gaul and Italy were almost completely ruined. The country and small cities were depopulated. What was left of men and wealth was congested in a few great centers. Precious metals disappeared. Agriculture, industry and commerce were perishing.

With the death of Alexander Severus began an interminable series of civil wars, of external wars, of pestilence and famine which lasted without interruption for a half century and which depopulated and impoverished the Empire, destroying the elite by whom the Empire had been governed, pacified and civilized during the first and second centuries. This sorry state of affairs was brought about by the ceaseless struggle among the various legions of the army to elect their favorite as Emperor. Residing in different lands, the legions were in continual conflict over the succession to the throne.

1. Ferrero, G., op. cit., p. 11ff.

The legitimacy of an Emperor was decided by war and the sword. The ruin of ancient civilization was then the effect of a slow decadence due to internal causes and a terrible accident which destroyed at a blow the key to all legal order and threw civilization into the convulsions of a revolutionary despotism.¹ Conditions were so unstable that at any moment the career of an Emperor might be closed by assassination. This became so serious an evil and the succession so swift and changeable that the system of Diocletian by which the government was shared by four princes became a necessity.²

In these times of civil war, no one cared for the interests of the people. New recruits were levied compulsorily. Means of transport and men were requisitioned for armies on the march. Foodstuffs and war materials had to be provided by the people and the soldiers were quartered in their homes.³

Aurelian was the first to try to stop the decomposition of the Empire and its return to barbarism by a vast plan of wars and reforms. He instituted officially the cult of Sol Invictus, proclaiming latinized mithraism as the religion of the state. He tried to convert the Empire into an Asiatic Empire. This met a fierce opposition. In 275 Aurelian himself fell victim to a conspiracy of generals. Civil war again commenced.⁴

Cyprian, writing at this period, asks his friend Donatus

1. Ferrero, *op. cit.*, p. 53.

2. Carr, Arthur, *The Church and the Roman Empire*. London, 1902, p. 5.

3. Rostovtzeff, M., *op. cit.*, p. 363.

4. Ferrero, *Ibid.*, p. 81.

to pass life in review - the criminal classes, the arena, the theatre, the forum - all these were corrupting influences. But there were others no less dangerous; locked up capital, great estates, evictions and the disappearance of the yeoman, luxury side by side with pauperism, the disruption of the client bond and the disowning of obligation between rich and poor.¹

In spite of the political disorder and the chaos which resulted, Christianity flourished. Itself a religio illicita, it found its greatest freedom when the laws were not enforced. While the Empire was in turmoil politically, the Christian Church was laying firm foundations in preparation for triumph. It was the strong Emperors who persecuted Christianity. The weak Emperors were more tolerant. The political weakness of the third century Empire was therefore an advantage for the Christian Church.

2. Exploitation of the Provinces.

Another aspect of the declining prosperity of the Empire was the systematic exploitation of the provinces by the irresponsible Emperors of the third century. Wars are always expensive and particularly so are civil wars which yield no booty but cause much destruction of property and life within the country.

The burden of taxation was heavy but so long as it was not excessive it was borne by the richer classes willingly and with a wonderful public spirit. But as early even as the end

1. Cyprian, Ad Donatum. Kidd, B. J., Documents Illustrative of the History of the Church, Vol. 1, p. 437. Macmillan, 1920.

of the first century, it became increasingly difficult to find men ready to serve the city without remuneration. In Spain from the very moment when municipal life was being established in the poorer parts of the country, measures were taken to provide the necessary numbers of magistrates by compulsion, if necessary. The situation was aggravated by the part which the cities had to play in the financial organization of the Empire. Tax farmers were replaced by the magistrates and the senates of the cities.¹

The imperial policy toward the cities was manifested in the creation of special inspectors (curatores) of their invested capital. In the third century this and other innovations were legally established and became the financial foundation of the economic policy of the Empire. The method of improving the financial management of the Empire which its rulers adopted proved fatal. With one hand they endeavored to create a healthy middle class and establish new centers of civilized life, and with the other they destroyed their own work by retaining the system of compulsory labor, of requisitions and of supplementary levies. This undermined both the spirit and the material welfare of the most energetic elements in the Italian and provincial cities. Discontent was plainly growing among the lower classes as well. In the third century they began to send to Rome a shower of complaints about the maltreatment to which they were subjected.²

1. Rostovtzeff, M., op. cit., p. 339.

2. Ibid., p. 342.

Barnes gives as one of the political defects of the Roman Empire, the "expense of administration and the inadequacy of Roman imperial finances." He further outlines the defects of imperial public finance and the system of taxation under the following heads:

- (a) Decline in the productive power after the conquest and rise of the plutocracy.
- (b) Reduced power of paying taxes with increase of need for public expenditures.
- (c) Inadequacy of fiscal organization.
- (d) Diversity of economic status of peoples in the Empire.
- (e) Difficulties of tax collections, imperfect public responsibility, the crushing of the curiales and chronic evasion of responsibilities by the great landlords.¹

Here are sufficient causes for making the burden of taxation in the provinces unbearable for those upon whom the burden fell.

The economic requirements of the government had increased rapidly. The large standing army needed its pay at regular intervals. The number of magistrates had been multiplied and the cost of operating the government had grown because of the increased expenditure and extravagance of Emperors and many other high officials. Revenue to meet these large expenses was obtained by taxation, but since coins were practically worthless, money taxes failed to supply the needs of the government and resort was made to taxation in kind. The burden fell chiefly on poor peasant proprietors. The rich escaped the burden because their taxes were proportionately lighter and they had means of avoiding payment.²

1. Barnes, H. E., Social History of the Western World. Appleton, 1921, p. 55.

2. Abbott, F. F., Common People of Ancient Rome, Scribners, 1917, p. 155

Healey, speaking of the time of Valerian, says:

The prodigality and luxury of the court and the incessant demands on the public treasury had long since exhausted whatever reserve funds the government could command and inasmuch as the custom of borrowing money on the national credit had never been adopted, there were no resources at hand for the prosecution of the many wars which the salvation of the Empire demanded.¹

This led to the terrible charge of supplementary taxes or super-interdictions which ruined and made desperate the bourgeoisie. The tax was divided by the Pretorian Prefect to each provincial governor. He in turn apportioned it to the cities and the municipal senate was made responsible for the total tax to be raised. They apportioned it to the people, making the largest part rest upon the small. Wherever the fisc turned, it suppressed the life of the people by these extraordinary taxes.² No wonder that for many citizens municipal life lost its interest and that compulsion was necessary to provide magistrates and members of municipal senates.³

In the second half of the third century, when the chaotic condition of things was arrested by the statesmanship of Aurelian and Diocletian, the policy of compulsion was brought to bear with full weight on the well-to-do inhabitants of the cities. The middle class was already overburdened with service. They were compelled to take over without salary the various munera or charges of local government, to administer the town,

1. Healey, P. J., The Valerian Persecution. Houghton, Mifflin Company, 1905, p. 123.

2. Maurice, J., Constantine le Grand et l'origine de la

3. Civilisation Chrétienne, Paris, 1924, p. 234.
~~Cambridge Medieval History~~, Vol. I, p. 354.

to act as petty justices, to take part in deputations, to arrange games, to inspect public buildings, to provide fuel for the baths, to superintend postal and transport service, etc, etc. The most burdensome of their obligations was the collection of the taxes. In consequence of these burdens, the curiales attempted in large numbers to escape into the more privileged professions, the clergy or the army or even to take flight into the country where they were glad to live and work as coloni.¹

Rostovtzeff described the situation at the beginning of the reign of Diocletian thus:

The relations between the state and the taxpayer were based on more or less organized robbery; forced work, forced deliveries, forced gifts or loans were the order of the day. The administration was corrupt and demoralized. A chaotic mass of new government officials was growing up, superimposed or superseding the former administrative personnel. The old officials still existed but foreseeing their doom, strove to avail themselves to the full of their last opportunities. The city bourgeoisie was tracked out and persecuted, cheated and maltreated. The municipal aristocracy was decimated by systematic persecution and ruined by frequent confiscations and by the responsibility imposed upon it of insuring the success of the organized raids of the government upon the people. The most terrible chaos thus reigned throughout the Empire.²

Diocletian failed to improve matters in regard to taxation. He systematized the unusual demands so that each year definite requirements were made, varying from year to year. No reserves were accumulated, thus making exceedingly heavy demands necessary.

1. Cambridge Medieval History, Vol. I, p. 555.
 2. Rostovtzeff, M., op. cit., p. 453.

Lactantius bears witness to the extravagance of Diocletian which made these heavy levies necessary:

To this were added a certain passion for building and, on this account, endless exactions from the provinces for furnishing wages to laborers and artificers and supplying carriages and whatever was requisite to the works which he projected. Here public halls, there a circus, here a mint, and there a workhouse for making implements of war; in one place a habitation for his empress, and in another for his daughter. Presently a great part of the city was quitted and all men removed with their wives and children as from a town taken by enemies. And when these buildings were completed, to the destruction of whole provinces, he said: "They are not right, let them be done another plan." Then they were to be pulled down or altered, to undergo perhaps a future demolition. By such folly was he continually endeavoring to equal Nicomedia with Rome in magnificence. I omit mentioning how many perished on account of their possessions or wealth; for such evils were exceedingly frequent, and through their frequency appeared to be lawful. But this was peculiar to him, that, whenever he saw a field remarkably well cultivated, or a house of uncommon elegance, a false accusation and a capital punishment were straightway prepared against the proprietor; so that it seemed as if Diocletian could not be guilty of rapine without shedding blood.¹

Heavy as taxation was, amounting in many cases to exploitation, it would not have been unbearable had production kept pace with the requirements of the state. But with the civil wars and the destruction of order in the Empire, also with the establishment of the colonate, production and the ability to pay taxes decreased, making the burden doubly hard.²

The Church was benefited by this state of affairs.

Curiales of the towns and cities were attracted to its protection giving over their money. Those who were ruined financially

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1. Lactantius, *De Mortibus Persecutorum*. c. vii., in Kidd, B. J. *op. cit.*, Vol. 1, p. 229.
 2. Westermann, W. L., *op. cit.*

found there an asylum and assistance in re-establishing themselves. The Church was a kind and beneficent organization which stood in marked contrast to the compulsion and harsh methods of the state.

3. Debasement of the Coinage.

Another aspect of the decline of prosperity was the debasement of the coinage. Roman economic methods were demoralized. Under the Empire, the amount of gold and silver had not materially increased, because the mining of precious metals had diminished, yet at the same time, gold and silver were continually removed from circulation for use in the arts, for the temple offerings and hoarded by private persons. Added to this drain on the circulating medium, enormous sums of money were continually exported to Arabia, India, and China, to pay for silk, spices, perfumes and many other luxuries. The imported food supply involved the drain of money from Italy. As a natural consequence, money in circulation grew less and less each year. To remedy this situation the government tried the expedient of debasing the coinage by mixing copper with the precious metals. This practice had attained such proportions by the middle of the third century A. D. that a piece which was worth forty cents at the time of Augustus came to be worth but one cent. Soon the well known principle that alloyed coins drive pure coins out of circulation began to act and all gold and silver coins were driven out of circulation by the pale copper coins. An era of rising prices was experienced as a

result.¹

Capital became scarce and interest of 12% considered excessive at the time of Nero, became the monthly interest. In part to remedy the scarcity of gold and in part to make possible expenses of war and other public expenses without increasing the taxes, the emperors altered the weight and purity of the coins. Under Caracalla, the weight of the aureus had gone down to 6 gr. 55, but after Alexander Severus it became so irregular that payments in gold were made only by weight. For silver money it was even worse. Even bronze money was put out at a reduced weight. From this arose a continual impoverishment of the most numerous classes and the least rich. Still worse, many of the emperors ordered that taxes be collected in gold or in kind. Thus they refused the bad money with which they inundated the Empire.²

Growing out of this situation, commodity money was withdrawn from circulation through hoarding within the Empire. This is attested by the hundreds of finds of coins in all parts of the Empire. Hoarding was due primarily to the lack of deposit banks and was greatly increased when economic disorders began to appear in the second century and reached their climax in the third century.

The foolish policy of the emperors in making cheap money and the general economic conditions as well as the system of organized pillage (the liturgies) produced violent and spasmodic

1. Abbott, F. F., Common People of Ancient Rome, p. 110.

2. Ferrero, op. cit., p. 74.

fluctuations of prices which did not keep pace with the steady depreciation of the currency.¹ Adding this unstable condition of money to the civil wars and political disorder, we have a very uncertain economic situation.

4. Industry and Commerce of the Third Century.

In no place is economic insecurity felt more than in the industry and commerce of a country. The troublous times of the third century wrought havoc on the far flung lines of commerce and the growing industries of the preceding era of peace and prosperity.

Commerce was especially affected. The general insecurity, the difficulty of communication, the greater risk and the increased price of travel, the restrictions imposed by the growing poverty - all this hindered the commercial activity of the third century. The small and modest fortune disappeared and in the midst of the growing misery, wealth was concentrated in a few hands.²

Commerce was hindered by insecurity of travel on land and sea due to robbers and pirates. The Empire was full of people homeless because of confiscations. They formed bands of robbers and devastated the land. We hear of an army of bandits under Bulla which was the terror of Italy for years. A military force was necessary to suppress him. Similar conditions existed in Germany, Gaul and the other provinces.³ In the time

1. Westermann, W. L., op. cit.

2. Ferrero, G., op. cit., p. 74.

3. Rostovtzeff, M., op. cit., p. 362.

of Alexander Severus, robbers infested both land and sea. It was like the deplorable condition in the first century B. C. when piracy made commerce practically impossible. Cyprian was full of pessimism in describing the situation. He spoke of complete exhaustion of the forces of nature and of mankind.¹

The conditions of brigandage were so bad in the third century that the government had to organize a special military police. The institution of field gendarmes was developed and a well planned net work of military posts was devised and established. Rostovtzeff says further:

My impression is that in the first and second centuries, the cities were fairly successful in combatting robbery and that it was the misery of the second half of the second century and of the third century that revived the plague and forced the Emperors to organize strong corps of military police and to insist that the cities take a more active part in suppressing brigandage by introducing new municipal offices such as guardians of the peace.²

Thus, commerce, which is usually the chief source of wealth was much hindered by brigandage during the period of our study.

The falling off of the spirit of commercial enterprise is evidenced by the history of the trade of the Empire with India. As proved by the finds of Roman coins in India, the eastern trade flourished from the time of Augustus to that of the Antonines. It reached its greatest height about the last of the first century. But evidences of continued trade exist until the middle of the third century, followed by a lull which

1. Rostovtzeff, M., op. cit., p. 380.

2. Ibid., p. 620.

lasted until a revival occurred at the close of the fourth century.¹ Thus we see proof of almost complete cessation of distant commercial enterprise during the insecure and critical years of the third century.

S. Dill notes that

It has often been pointed out that the wars and social confusion of the latter part of the third century gave a shock to commerce from which it never recovered. In that disastrous time the vast destruction of wealth, the interruption of free circulation on the great routes, the loss of confidence, and the portentous depreciation of the currency must have operated with crushing effect on the trading class.²

It was not alone because of pirates and barbarians that commerce decayed but also because customers disappeared. The best clients, the city bourgeoisie, decreased constantly in numbers and in purchasing power. The peasants lived in extreme poverty and reverted to an almost pure "house economy," each home producing for itself what it needed.³

Still another hindrance to trade was the rigid restriction placed by the government upon merchants and sailors. There was no chance for large commercial enterprise. As soon as a man bought ships, he was made a member of one of the corporations, the *navicularii* or the *mercatores* and forced to work for the state, to transport goods on its behalf and for a miserable remuneration or to give the state the first offer of what he had to sell. Compulsion kept them bound. Like the ownership

1. Westermann, M. L., *op. cit.*

2. Dill, S., Roman Society in the Last Century of the Western Empire, New York, 1898. p. 246.

3. Rostovtzeff, M., *op. cit.*, p. 470.

of land, commerce and transportation became an hereditary burden from which there was no escape. To make matters worse, customers were few, the market became more and more restricted and the state more and more oppressive. The state was a selfish and a brutal customer. It fixed the prices and if we take into consideration the profits of the officials, fixed them ruinously low.¹

Along with the decline in commerce and of more serious consequence was the decline in production. Industry was affected by the general economic and moral decline of all society. The proletariat was becoming poorer and more desperate while its productive forces were declining more and more. Thus hopelessness and despair seized all classes and crippled their initiative.²

Manufacture in this period was carried on by artisans working singly in their own shops. Factories with machinery failed to develop. The scale of wages was fixed by the rate of slave hire since it was customary for owners to let their slaves out by the day or job in the various occupations to which they had been trained.³

The question of labor had become acute in the third century. The population of the Empire became more and more shifting. Oppressed in one place, the proletariat would move to

1. Rostovtzeff, M., op. cit., p. 471.

2. Kautsky, K., op. cit., p. 465.

3. Chapin, F. S., Introduction to Social Economy, Part II, Century Co. New York, 1921, p. 108.

another until measures had to be taken to bind the peasant to his land and the laborer to his occupation and native city.¹

In this law of "origo," we have a loss of economic liberty that seriously crippled industrial initiative. The oppressive taxation based on the enslavement of the tillers of the soil and the artisans alike crushed the spirit of the workers.

From the time of Alexander Severus, the trade and crafts guilds were encouraged by the Emperors because of the service they might render to the state. Corporations of wine merchants, grocers, shoemakers and other crafts were fostered. It is possible that this was done to stimulate the already declining industry of the second quarter of the third century. Later under Aurelianus another and more powerful attempt was made in the same direction. The public service that they rendered rather than personal advantage was the motive of the state. Bakers were authorized to form a craft guild because the state wanted their services in regulating the trade in bread and providing for the needs of the inhabitants of the cities. Because the workers with their families were bound to their guild, all freedom in the choice of profession came to an end. All attempts of single members to leave their place of residence and customary work was considered as a flight from duty and severely forbidden.² Thus all hope of industrial progress from personal initiative and mobility of labor was lost.

1. Rostovtzeff, M., *op. cit.*, p. 465.

2. Cambridge Medieval History, Vol. 1, p. 551.

In agriculture the development of the colonate destroyed individual initiative and brought about decreased production. With the decrease of the slave supply it became necessary to lease the great imperial estates to conductores or lease-holders who in turn sub-leased the estates to large numbers of poor peasants who were bound by the lease not to leave the domain. These coloni, as they were called, were at the mercy of the large lease-holders and their condition was deplorable. Agricultural production under these conditions could not be otherwise than bad. This system of labor was carried out also on large private estates which were taking the place of the small holdings in the hard times of the third century. Thus the number of free agricultural production units declined enormously. With decreased agricultural production and taxpaying ability, the weight of taxation fell upon the decurions of the city-states. Thus in the third century the middle class landholders were forced to the wall under the burden of liturgical obligations and the lesser estates helped to swell the vast domains of the land barons who were strong enough to resist the pressure and force immunities from the government.¹

The establishment of the colonate along with the decline of industry brought about a reversion to a primitive economic order in which each person supplied as far as possible his own needs. The failure in the purchasing power of the peasants ruined the industries of the cities. Each separate locality tended to live its own life and work out its own needs without

1. Westermann, E. L., op. cit.

much help from other localities.¹ Thus society fell back from a complicated system of commercial and industrial intercourse to the simpler form of "natural economy." Such a movement was inimical to prosperity.

The result of the decline of commerce and industry was widespread poverty in the third century such as had not been known before. In fact, poverty came to be accepted as a matter of course. Chapin says:

This poverty was woven through the very texture of industrial life. With the institution of slavery economically necessary and morally justified, with the social ideal of a leisured life free from manual toil, it was hardly possible to develop the modern ideal of economic independence for every one through personal and productive labor. Consequently dependence involved no stigma; if it was not actually praiseworthy, it was at least quite regular and no one thought of alleviating or preventing poverty by constructive and rehabilitative methods.²

The Christian Church through its socialistic tendencies of cooperation and equalization thrived on industrial and commercial decline. A similar phenomenon is to be noted in the fact that in the United States, the great revivals have followed the great financial panics. In their economic distress, it is only natural for people to turn to the supernatural powers for relief. The agency best fitted to supply this relief was the Church which supplied immediate relief to the suffering, encouraged work and promised better times for the future. Again we see forces that are destructive to the Empire, promoting the growth of the Church.

1. Cambridge Medieval History, Vol. 1, p. 547.

2. Chapin, F. S., Introduction to Social Economy, Part II, p. x.

5. Shifting Population.

Depopulation has often been named as one of the causes for the decline of the Empire. But the shifting of population from the small cities and rural districts to the great centers also played an important part. Ferrero points out that

The small cities were abandoned and depopulated. In the large cities, the population increased and one sees the number of miserable folk increase who live in a form of mendicancy on the rich or on the state. The state became the providence and the torment of all the world. Its taxation imposed by the incessant multiplication of the bureaucracy, by the mendicancy of the masses, by the increase of military expense was atrocious and implacable.¹

The natural movement of the economically oppressed classes was toward the cities where doles of corn were meted out and a living was assured. This was the unavoidable consequence of the economic ills of the age. The idle populations of the cities were thus augmented by those who should have been producing crops and wares.

On the other hand, there are grounds for the theory that depopulation actually existed. Barnes listed as social causes of the decline:

- a. Extinction of the best elements in society
 - (a) losses in wars
 - (b) riots and factional strife at home
 - (c) tendencies toward sexual excesses or celibacy
 - (d) economic burdens and discouragement to increase of population.
- b. Depopulation
 - (a) wars
 - (b) luxury and love of ease
 - (c) lax sexual mores
 - (d) economic inequalities
 - (e) unsanitary conditions in the Roman cities

1. Ferrero, G., op. cit., p. 74.

(f) prevalence of malaria and plagues.¹

That there were large losses of population in the third century for the above mentioned causes goes without question. Wars were incessant. Economic conditions were such as to discourage the rearing of large families. Besides, the unsanitary conditions in the cities to which the people flocked were such as to produce disease and often plagues. Of particular note was the plague of 250 A. D. which lasted for twenty years. About 250 this frightful pestilence began its ravages in Numidia and descending thence to the cities of Egypt and Africa, it was carried to other cities and spread death and desolation from east to west. For upward of twenty years it wasted the Roman legions and it spared neither high nor low. Hostilianus, son of the Emperor Decius, succumbed. In 270, the Emperor Claudius died of it. It proved most disastrous to the armies of Valerian who were fighting the Persians. It reduced the population of Alexandria by half. For some time it killed 5,000 persons daily in Rome.²

Westermann says:

The depopulation of the third and succeeding centuries is primarily a result of decline and only secondarily and in the culmination of disasters a cause.³

The movement of population to the large centers was a decided advantage to Christianity since Christianity was from the beginning an urban movement. The classes who came were those who had greatest need of what Christianity had to give.

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1. Barnes, H. E., Social History of the Western World, p. 52.
 2. Healey, P. J., The Valerian Persecution, p. 92.
 3. Westermann, W. L., op. cit.

With this movement of the population, the numbers of Christians increased. Besides, the causes that brought about depopulation were such as had little effect upon Christians. They were not in the armies in any large numbers. They did not indulge in the luxury of the day but tended rather to the ascetic life. Their economic burdens were borne through labor and frugality. The result of these forces was a phenomenal increase of Christian population in proportion to the pagan.

6. Social Revolution.

From the political and economic crisis, arose the social crisis. The aristocracy of the middle class which had increased through the first and second centuries and had developed the Roman civilization had now disappeared. Their riches passed to a new oligarchy of enriched ones. These newly rich came up largely from the lower classes who had obtained political and military power. The Empire was becoming less cultured through this revolution which gave power and wealth to barbarian soldiers and civil officials. What remained of wealth was wasted in barbarous luxury or in gigantic useless buildings in the large cities.¹

The policy of Septimius Severus was followed throughout the social revolution. It was a systematic militarization of the government, giving power to the soldiers. In the terrorism which resulted, there was a development of compulsion in labor and in the requisitioning of food stuffs, raw materials, manufactured goods, money, ships or whatever the army

1. Ferrero, op. cit., p. 77.

might need. There was also a tendency to bind every individual to the place of his birth. The policy of compulsion undermined the prosperity of the Empire and the spirit of the people. At the same time it destroyed one aristocracy and created another.

This social revolution of the third century which destroyed the foundations of the economic, social and intellectual life of the ancient world could not produce any positive results in the way of achievement. Rostovtzeff points out that:

On the ruins of a prosperous and well-organized state, based on the age-old classical civilization and on the self-government of the cities, it built up a state which was based on general ignorance, on compulsion and violence, on slavery and servility, on bribery and dishonesty.....The Empire of the fourth century and above all that of Diocletian grew up in the atmosphere of violence and compulsionTheir (Diocletian and Constantine) aim was to save the Roman Empire and they achieved it. To this end they used the means which were familiar to them, violence and compulsion. They never asked whether it was worth while to save the Roman Empire in order to make it a vast prison for scores of millions of men.¹

The catastrophe of the third century dealt a severe blow to the culture as well as to the prosperity of the Empire. Such an age of compulsion leaves little free initiative for the development of art and culture. The creative energies of the Empire were weakened.

Although productive economic activity declined, yet large fortunes were made as the result of the social revolution. These were not founded upon the creative energies of men nor upon discovery of new sources of wealth, nor upon commercial or industrial enterprise. It was rather through privileged position

1. Rostovtzeff, M., op. cit., p. 477.

in the state to exploit both state and people alike. Public officials both high and low grew rich on bribery and corruption. The senatorial class especially grew rich through exemption from the municipal burdens. They invested their money in land, thus diverting the burden of taxation to other classes.¹

From the "Lament of the Poor Man against the Rich Man" in the Pseudo-Quintilian Declamations, we have an illustration of the situation brought about by the development of the large privileged estates.

I have not always been the neighbor of a rich man. All around me there once were farms of independent farmers, equally rich, who tilled their humble lands in neighborly peace. How different it is now! The land that once fed all these citizens is now a single great plantation, belonging to one rich man. His estate has expanded in all directions. The peasant homes which it has devoured have been razed to the ground and the figures of the ancestral gods destroyed. The former proprietors had to take leave of the patron gods of their ancestral house and proceed to foreign parts with their wives and children. A great uniformity of work prevails over the wide expanse. Everywhere wealth encloses me as with a wall. Here is the rich man's garden, there are his fields, here his vineyards, there his forests and pastures. I, too, would gladly have departed but I could not find a single spot of ground where I should not have had rich men as neighbors. For where do we not find the private estates of the wealthy?.....And nowhere does this expanse encounter any limit, any barrier except when the rich man's land meets the land of another rich man. And another element of the contempt which these rich men have for us poor is that they do not even consider it worth while to deny their actions if they have been guilty of any violations of our rights.²

While the Pseudo-Quintilian Declamations cannot be dated with

1. Rostovtzeff, M., *op. cit.*, p. 475.

2. Pöhlmann, Robert, *Geschichte des antiken Kommunismus und Sozialismus*. München, 1893. Vol. 2, p. 582ff.

certainly, this description pictures a situation which the development of the large privileged estates produced. Barnes mentions the development of the villa system and the agrarian concentration and autocracy as a phenomenon of decline. Contributing to this situation were the immunities of the great landlords and the rise of the colonate. The senatorial class was revived and appeared as an agrarian plutocracy in the later Empire as it had in the later Republic.¹

This new greed for wealth is found even among the soldiers. Septimius Severus owed his power to the army which he supplied with gold and other advantages at the expense of the other classes. Clement of Alexandria speaks of the soldiers' greed for gold:

But now even the soldiers wish to be decked
with gold, not having heard that poetical saying:
"With childish folly to the war he came
Laden with store of gold." (Iliad II 872)²

The result of this social upheaval was that many became poor where the few became rich. It was a period of great uncertainty and distress.

In the unstable state of society in the third century, the old aristocracy gave way to a new aristocracy. Among the new aristocracy were many Christians who were able to gain wealth through industry and frugality as well as through official position. The warnings of Clement of Alexandria and of Cyprian to fellow Christians in regard to wealth indicates the possession of wealth by Christians. The triumph of

1. Barnes, H. E., op. cit., p. 52ff.

2. Paed. II xiii.

Christianity in the early fourth century may also be considered a part of the social revolution. Christians, once a despised class, then came to power and recognition.

7. Failure of Diocletian's Reforms.

Diocletian took up immediately the work of Aurelian to establish an Asiatic despotism in the hands of an absolute sovereign who would appear to his subjects as an incarnation of divinity.¹ He found the Empire in a sorry state and proceeded to make reforms of various kinds. His reforms were conditioned by the social revolution of the third century and were bound to follow much the same lines. His goal was the restoration of the state. In this he succeeded but at the expense of the interests of the people. Rostovtzeff says of the condition of affairs when Diocletian assumed control:

He took over a heavy heritage from the third century, to which he had to conform. In this heritage there was almost nothing positive except the fact of the existence of the Empire with all its natural resources. The men who inhabited it had utterly lost their balance. Hatred and envy reigned everywhere. The peasant hated the land owners and the officials. The city proletariat hated the bourgeoisie. The army was hated by everybody, even by the peasants. The Christians were abhorred and persecuted by the heathen who regarded them as a gang of criminals bent on undermining the state.²

Diocletian first attempted a political reform in order to insure the succession and as he thought avoid the disastrous civil wars. He chose an associate designated as an

1. Ferrero, op. cit., p. 88.

2. Rostovtzeff, M., op. cit., p. 453.

Augustus and two Caesars. The Caesars were to succeed the Augusti and in turn name other Caesars. This would make a perfect succession. But it failed to work, as the civil wars which followed Diocletian's abdication bear witness. Lactantius speaks as follows of this reform:

This man by avarice partly and partly by timid counsels, overturned the Roman Empire: for he made choice of three persons to share the government with him: and thus the Empire having been quartered, armies were multiplied and each of the four princes strove to maintain a much more considerable military force than any sole emperor had done in times past.¹

This increase in administrative forces seems to have been carried out all through the government. Lactantius goes on:

There began to be fewer men who paid taxes than there were who received wages, so that the means of the husbandman, being exhausted by enormous impositions, the farms were abandoned, cultivated grounds became woodland and universal dismay prevailed. Besides, the provinces were divided into minute portions, and many presidents and a multitude of inferior officers lay heavy on each territory and almost on each city.²

To support these officers, heavy levies of extraordinary taxes had to be placed upon all the Empire. In his taxation reforms Diocletian simply established the system of extraordinary taxation which his predecessors had practiced. This, of course, brought no economic relief but simply made matters worse as far as the taxpayers were concerned. It is no wonder that his reforms failed to lead to any revival of economic life and the restoration of prosperity. Under their heavy burdens, the

1. Lactantius, *De Mortibus Persecutorum*, c. VII sec. 2.

2. *Ibid.*, sec. 3, 4.

people could not but submit. Rostovtzeff says of the people of this time:

A wave of resignation swept over the Empire - people became content to stay where they were for fear of a worse lot for there was no chance for a person to better his condition. Thus the reigning mood was resignation and resignation never leads to prosperity.¹

Perhaps the most famous of Diocletian's reforms is the Edict on the high cost of living which set maximum prices for commodities. Prices had been rising all through the century because of the wars, the decrease in production and the debasement of the coinage. The enactment speaks of the evil greed of avaricious producers and venders and declares in the name of the "fathers of human kind" that justice had to arbitrate and intervene. The Emperors were especially incensed at the hard bargains which were extorted from soldiers quartered in the provinces or moving along the roads. Prices on such occasions were put up to many times the value.

A paragraph from the edict expresses the seemingly sincere motive of the Emperor:

Who is of so hardened a heart and so untouched by a feeling for humanity that he can be unaware, nay that he has not noticed that in the sale of wares which are exchanged in the market, or dealt with in the daily business of the cities, an exorbitant tendency in prices has spread to such an extent, that the unbridled desire of plundering is held in check neither by abundance nor by seasons of plenty.²

Maximum prices for both wages and foods were set by the edict. These are compared by Abbott as follows:

1. Rostovtzeff, M., op. cit., p. 469.

2. Abbott, F. F., Common People of Ancient Rome, p. 155ff.

Wages and Foods - 301 A. D.

Wages per Day

Unskilled workman	10.8¢
Bricklayer	21.6¢
Carpenter	21.6¢
Stone-mason	21.6¢
Blacksmith	21.6¢
Painter	32.4¢
Shipbuilder	21¢ to 25¢
(received keep also)	

Common Food

Wheat per bushel	33.6¢
Rye " "	45 ¢
Beans " "	45 ¢
Barley " "	74.5¢
Fresh pork lb.	7.3¢
Mutton lb.	4.9¢
Seafish lb.	9 to 14¢
Cheese lb.	7.3¢
Eggs doz.	5.1¢
Milk, sheep's, qt.	6 ¢

This shows wages extremely low in comparison to the prices of foodstuffs. The advantage would seem to be with the merchant. Yet it was the merchant class which made the enforcement of the edict impossible. They withheld from sale the goods upon which prices has been set. Lactantius reports that blood flowed and that the impossibility of enforcing cheapness was only recognized after fruitless attempts to terrorize tradesmen into submission.

To quote Lactantius:

He also when, by various extortions, he had made all things exceedingly dear, attempted by an ordinance to limit their prices. Then much blood was shed for the veriest trifles. Men were afraid to expose aught for sale, and the scarcity became more excessive and grievous than ever; until in the end, the ordinance, after having proved destructive to multitudes was from mere necessity abrogated.¹

Diocletian failed thus to reestablish economic prosperity in the Empire by his arbitrary reforms. Meanwhile, Christianity was growing in power and influence, thus exciting the jealousy of Galerius who induced Diocletian to launch a

1. Lactantius, De Mortibus Persecutorum, c, vii, sec. 7.

persecution against them. For a time things looked discouraging for the Christians because of the destruction of life and property. But with the edict of Galerius to cease persecuting, the Christians emerged from the persecution still strong. Their strength was the more to be recognized because of the hot struggle. The failure of Diocletian to establish prosperity in the Empire as Augustus had done left still the need for an agency that could insure prosperity. This need was still apparent when Constantine came to the control of the Empire and it was in the failure of all other agencies that Christianity found its opportunity.

Summary of Economic Decline of the Empire.

The third century was a period of crisis for the Roman Empire. The political disorder initiated civil wars that destroyed the productive forces. Confidence failed and security was unknown. In industry the loss of economic freedom destroyed initiative. Commerce declined because of the insecurity of travel and the heavy burdens levied by the government. Through extraordinary taxes, the provinces were exploited and the middle classes of the cities ruined. An ineffective remedy was sought in the debasement of the coinage but this only made matters worse. Population in the small cities and rural districts grew less. While population in the large centers was increased by the poverty stricken and ruined citizens. A social revolution was in progress in which many who were wealthy were brought low and many who were poor attained wealth. Finally, Diocletian strove to correct the ills of the state

by radical reforms but failed to restore prosperity.

It was this disorganized and unstable state of affairs that gave Christianity its chance to grow in strength. In contrast to the compulsion and extortion of the state, Christianity offered love and relief in time of need. This constituted a great drawing power for Christianity. Besides, in the light of the distress and economic instability of the Empire, the prospering Church stood out in bold relief as an important economic unit. The very economic crisis of the third century was a most potent economic factor in the final triumph of the Church which had been able to sustain itself and prosper in such troublous times.

CHAPTER III

THE GROWING ECONOMIC IMPORTANCE OF THE CHRISTIAN CHURCH IN ROMAN SOCIETY

Christianity began in a very humble way but it had within it the vitality to grow to vast proportions. This growth was especially noticeable during the third century of our era. This growth was not only a growth in numbers but also in social significance. The Church was becoming a part of Roman society, integrating itself with its environment so as best to fulfil the needs of the society of the time. With numbers came wealth and influence. Christianity, by the end of the third century was no longer a rustic group of zealots but rather a power with which any leader of the state must reckon.

By the end of the second century, the Church had already made good her position. During the third century, she so strengthened it that, early in the fourth century, she forced the state to grant her recognition. As one writer has said, "The Church in the Empire became the Church of the Empire."

In this rapid stride to the fore during the third century, the Church proved itself able to endure hard times as well as good times. The third century, as we have seen, was a period of economic decline for the Empire. Yet we see the Church making rapid progress both in numbers and in wealth.

Our problem in this chapter is to show that the economic importance of the Church was a factor in determining the final decision of Constantine to favor the Church. In the crisis of the early fourth century, why did Constantine choose

Christianity? It is at this point that we come nearest to economic determinism. The classic statement of this doctrine is found in the introduction to the "Communist Manifesto":

In every historical epoch, the prevailing mode of economic production and exchange and the social organization necessarily following from it, form the basis upon which is built up, and from which alone can be explained the political and intellectual history of that epoch;¹

We shall see how Constantine, seeking to restore prosperity and unity to the Empire chose the group of greatest economic importance to assist him in his project.

We see in the economic importance of the Church in Roman society at the beginning of the fourth century, the third economic factor in the triumph of Early Christianity.

1. Numerical Importance of Christianity.

Of prime importance in determining the relative economic importance of a group in society, is the numerical strength of that group. Numbers, of course, are not an absolute criterion for judging strength. Other factors such as individual effectiveness, group organization and social adjustment to existing conditions must enter into consideration. In the case of Early Fourth Century Christianity, the virility of the group that produced such rapid growth during the third century made the numerical strength of even greater importance. Considered economically, the number of productive economic units that could be drawn to the support of his administration was of vital interest to one who was founding an empire.

1. Communist Manifesto, Authorized Eng. Trans. Chicago, 1898.

It is difficult to gather statistics as to the actual numerical strength of the Christian Church at that time but various indications show that the Christian body was numerous.

One proof of their numbers lies in the frequency and growing magnificence of Christian churches which were to be found in all the large centers of population.¹ Eusebius speaks of the large congregations thus:

Who could describe those huge congregations which gathered in every city and the distinguished crowds in the churches? On whose account, not content with the ancient buildings, they erected spacious churches in all the cities.²

We see that the crowds were not only large but also "distinguished." Such were of the higher classes and so of greater economic importance.

Again we have the words of Theophanius on the numbers and distribution of Christians.

In the whole world and among all nations, in towns and in villages alike, have myriads not only of men but also of women maintained holiness and virginity intact, for the hope and expectation of the heavenly kingdom.

Nevertheless, when again I view its power and the result of its activity, how many myriads have given assent to it, and how churches of tens of thousands of men have been brought together by these very deficient and rustic persons... churches built not in obscure places, nor in those which are unknown, but rather in the greatest cities, I mean in the imperial city of Rome itself, in Alexandria, in Antioch, in all Egypt, in Libya, in Europe, in Asia, both in the villages and other places among all nations - I am again compelled to recur to the question of its cause and to confess that they could not

1. Carr, Arthur, The Church and the Roman Empire, 1902, p. 12.
2. Eusebius, H. E., VIII, 1.

otherwise have undertaken the enterprise than by a Divine power which exceeds that of man and by the assistance of Him who said to them: "Go and make disciples of all nations in my name."¹

The testimony of Tertullian, while it shows exaggeration is not without its value. To the Nations, he says:

Day by day you groan over the increasing numbers of the Christians. Your constant cry is that the State is beset (by us), that Christians are in your fields, in your camps, in your islands, You grieve over it as a calamity that each sex, every age - in short, every rank - is passing over from you to us.²

In his Apology, he continues:

We are men of yesterday; yet we have filled your places of resort - cities, lodging houses, villages, towns, markets, even the camp, tribes, town-councils, palace, senate, forum: we have left you nothing but your temples.³

B. J. Kidd comments that the ubiquity of Christians gave the impression of numbers greater than they actually possessed. This ubiquity seemed to follow from the easy and frequent intercourse between the different local churches of Christendom.⁴ It is with the impression made upon Constantine that we are concerned as much as with the actual numbers.

Even Celsus, who so berates Christianity, recognizes the strength of the movement as early as the time of Marcus Aurelius. So he turns to the Christians and begs them to help the Emperor in his council, and even to share in his military enterprises.⁵

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1. Theophanius IV, 32,V 49. Quoted by A. Harnack, op. cit. vol.2,p.2.
 2. Tertullian, Ad Nationes I 1.
 3. Ibid., Apology XXXVII
 4. Kidd, B.J., Hist. of the Christian Church, vol.I, p.345. Oxf. 1922
 5. Foakes Jackson, Studies in the Life of the Early Church, Doran, 1924, p. 153.

Cyprian reminded Demetrius of the fact that Christians, on being arrested made no resistance although their people were "numerous and plentiful."¹

Lucian, the martyr, writing just before the Diocletian persecution, says:

Almost the greater part of the world is now devoted to this truth, whole cities in fact; and if any of these be suspect, there are also multitudes of country folk, who are innocent of guile.²

Diocletian and Maximian issued edicts for the suppression of Christianity "when," according to Eusebius, "they saw almost all men deserting the worship of the gods, and attaching themselves to the Christian people."³

During the crisis of the third century, Christianity had made great progress. It had spread through all the Empire and among all classes. It had penetrated into the army, into the Senate, into the court. It had attracted the poor and the rich, the ignorant and the cultured class.⁴ It was especially during the forty-three years of freedom from persecution that Christianity enjoyed before the Diocletian persecution, that the greatest growth was made. These forty-three years enabled the Church to grow in numbers, in influence, and in buildings. Eusebius says that a new spirit began to be manifest in this period towards Christianity, in contrast to the spirit of contempt which had formerly prevailed. It was the spirit of eclecticism and toleration. Christianity was integrating itself

1. Cyprian, *Ad Demetrium*, XVII.

2. Lucian the Martyr, *Orat.* (in Rufinus H. E. IX, 6)

3. Eusebius, H. E. IX, 9.

4. Ferrero, G., *La ruine de la civilisation antique*. Paris, 1921, p. 90.

with society.¹ He further records that "many of those highly distinguished in wealth and family, with their whole house and kindred turned to their salvation!"²

Arnobius says:

That the Christian religion is the true one, is proved by its rapid spread, by its influence on the manners of barbarian peoples, and by its harmony with the opinions of the greatest philosophers.³

Thus, Christianity was gaining in numbers and in favor with Roman society.

No accessions to the ranks of the Church counted for more than the conversions of the great barristers: Minucius Felix, Tertullian, and Cyprian. Cyprian had the further prestige of wealth and social position. These latin writers brought Christianity to the attention of Rome. These literary productions of the third century made Christianity known in its importance to society. At the same time the Church asserted itself as a power not only in the spiritual domain but also in the legal and economic spheres.

2. Invincible in persecution.

The failure of the persecutions is a further witness not only to the numbers of the Christians but also to their strength. Lactantius says that their number "is never lessened, not even by persecution itself."⁴ Healey, in his work on the Valerian persecution, speaks of the rapid spread of Christianity

1. Eusebius, H. E. VI 43.

2. Ibid., IV 21

3. Cited by Bardenhewer, Patrologie, p. 201.

4. Divine Institutes, V xiii.

as not hindered by the fear of death.¹ Numbers increased as the number of martyrs increased. The fact that Christianity excited opposition is proof of its strength and importance.

The persecutions did claim their victims but as far as Christians in the mass were concerned, they succeeded only in forcing temporary apostasies. It was above all in the intervals between the crises that the Church derived most advantage from the testimony of blood in her work of propaganda.

At the beginning of the fourth century, after the miscarriage of Diocletian's persecution, the State began to realize that the Christians were too numerous for violent measures henceforth to succeed. Christianity was no longer to be solely the religion of the under-privileged. It already had members in all classes of society.²

Rostovtzeff says in regard to the invincible nature of the Christians that:

It was futile to persecute them: every persecution made their cohesion closer and the organization of the Church more solid. In the third century, the Christian Church acquired enormous strength. As a state within a state, its organization steadily improved as that of the state deteriorated. Oppression, compulsion, persecution, were the mottoes of the state: love, compassion, consolation were the maxims of the Church. The Church, unique in this respect among the other religious communities, not only administered spiritual relief, but promised and gave practical help in the miseries of actual life, while the state oppressed and persecuted the helper.³

This shows why "The blood of the martyrs was the seed of the

1. Healey, P. J., The Valerian Persecution.

2. Guignebert, C. A. H., Christianity, p. 167.

3. Rostovtzeff, op. cit., p. 456.

Church." The heroic strength of the Christians had an irresistible appeal which was increased relatively by the oppression of the state. They were invincible because none feared death.

Ferrero also points out that

These edicts (of Diocletian) are most eloquent documents of the power of Christianity. They witness clearly the hesitation of Diocletian to launch himself against an enemy which he knew to be so numerous and strong.¹

The fact that Diocletian failed in his persecution, which went on for nearly a decade in the eyes of all the world, added to the consciousness of the victory of the Church. It must be remembered that Diocletian was a strong Emperor who had saved the state from complete ruin.²

One reason for the ability to endure persecution was the way in which Christians helped those who suffered. From the Apostolic Constitutions, we glean this command:

Receive also those that are persecuted on account of the faith, and who "fly from city to city" on account of the Lord's commandment: and assist them as martyrs, rejoicing that ye are made partakers of their persecutions.....For he that is persecuted for the sake of the faith and endures is truly a man of God.³

Christians did all that they could even at the danger of their own lives to save their brethren. Wealthy Christians gave of their wealth. Bishops, whether in hiding or exile sustained their flocks through emissaries who went everywhere to the prisons and mines carrying messages of hope and comfort. This was especially true during the Valerian persecution and Cyprian is

1. Ferrero, G., La ruine de la civilisation antique. 1921, p.143.
 2. Foakes-Jackson, Studies in the Life of the Early Church. 1924,
 3. Apostolic Constitutions V, I iii. p. 238.

the outstanding example. The Christian virtues of love and heroic self-sacrifice were heightened during persecution. Thus Christianity increased its drawing power.

The numerical importance of Christianity was thus increased by this invincible heroism. It took men of courage to endure such tests. To a military leader like Constantine, such courage could not help but be attractive. In the establishment of his supremacy over the empire and the restoration of prosperity, he needed such men of courage who could fight with the emblem of the cross on their shields and win for him the victory over his rivals. The very courage of Christians was thus economically important to Constantine.

3. Christians Individually Self-sustaining.

Another reason for the economic importance of Christians in Roman society was that they were individually self-sustaining. This was an outstanding quality for any group to possess in a time when the rabble of paupers and idle folk were demanding larger and larger doles from the state each year. The problem of caring for this rabble became increasingly difficult for the Emperors. Constantine was without accumulated funds when he established his military position. So it was of greater advantage to him to encourage the group which was strongest economically.

Christians were strong economically because of their group solidarity that, as we have seen, amounted almost to communism. But their real strength rested upon the type of

individual which the movement produced. In the earlier days of the movement, it had been strongly chiliastic. This produced a disregard for things of this world. But when the end of the world did not come, their attitude changed. L. P. Edwards says in this regard:

It is therefore not surprising to find by the beginning of the third century, a movement to discard theoretical Chiliasm and communism and to validate by theoretical apologetic the actually existing individualism.....That famous opponent of Chiliasm (Clement of Alexandria) is equally well known as the justifier of extreme individualism. He greatly facilitated the spread of Christian theology by liberating it from the burden of an eschatological theory increasingly hard to reconcile with reality and by bringing the economic teachings of Christianity into conformity with current practice.¹

It was this individual adaptation to the social conditions of the day that formed the firm foundation for economic independence. In making this adaptation, however, Christians did not lose the enthusiasm of their religion but rather turned it to use in their work. So the economic importance of the Church may be said to rest upon self-sustaining individuals engaged in the industry, in the business, and in the public offices of the society in which they lived.

(a) Self-sustaining Through Work.

In the making of a living, Christians were compelled to engage in the occupations common in that day. The crafts and trades were open. There was no unemployment for those who

1. Edwards, L. P., The Transformation of Christianity From an Eschatological to a Sociological Movement. Ph. D. Thesis, University of Chicago, 1919, p. 47.

would work. Imports gave employment to thousands as sailors, clerks, middlemen, commission men, etc. Bakeries, meat markets, and other markets employed other thousands. Factories were operated by those of the third estate and by slaves. All crafts were operated by the third estate in which class so many Christians were found. Architecture was looked upon as one of the useful and profitable arts. The musician was held in high repute and was well paid, but teachers were poorly paid. Agriculture and the army were other means of employment.¹

The learning of trades was especially enjoined by the Church as we note from the literature. In Didache XVII we find the following command:

And let the boy when he is grown up, learn a handicraft, and when he is a man let him take the wage that is meet for his craft, and acquire the necessary tools that he may no longer be a burden on the charity of the brethren. Truly, blessed is he who is able to help himself, and does not straighten the place of the widows and orphans and the poor.²

From the Apostolic Constitutions, we have a similar command:

Ye fathers educate your children in the Lord, bringing them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord; and teach them such trades as are agreeable and suitable to the Word, lest they by such opportunity become extravagant and continue without punishment and so go astray from that which is good.³

This social and economic contact in every day life, forced many adjustments upon the Christian convert. There were occupations in which the Christian convert could not conscientiously work. Among those forbidden were those that had to do

1. Friedlander, L., Roman Life and Manners, 4v. New York, 1908, 13.

2. Quoted in Clarke, C., Church History from Nero to Constantine.
cont.

with Emperor worship, heathen rites, play acting, and magistracies. Also skilled handwork that had to do with the making of idols was forbidden. This often worked economic hardship to the Christians who happened to be skilled in these forbidden trades and occupations. Cyprian tells an actor who has been compelled to abandon his profession on confessing Christianity, to cease instructing others and offers him maintenance by the Church during his loss of employment. In many other cases, however, economic necessity compelled them to continue in their old positions. The Christian was faced with these problems of adjustment. First he manifested aloofness, then compromise, then conquest when Christianity dictated to society. The period of the third century was one of compromise and adjustment to things as they were. The sign of the cross and other magical tokens came to be used to ward off the dangers of pollution in these pagan contacts, so that the prohibitions were gradually broken down.

We might ask too how hard the Christian had to work in these various occupations to make a living. We are told that, when Diocletian issued his edict trying to regulate the high cost of living, cereals cost as much as now but the laborer received only $1/9$ as much as now.¹ This would indicate an almost unbearable condition for the laboring man. But Christians by their frugality, their industry and their helping of needy

Cont. from preceding page.- Milwaukee, 1920. p. 247.

3. Apostolic Constitutions IV ii xi.

1. Abbott, F. F., Common People of Ancient Rome.

members could survive even under unfavorable conditions.

The Christian's attitude toward work was an important factor in his economic independence. Christians from the first honored work. Christ and Paul worked. The Church often provided work for the idle. In the earlier days Christians worked seven days a week, being compelled by their employers. Later, when Sunday became a weekly holiday and the feast days were established, Christians were forbidden by the Church to work on these days.

Work was for the Christian above all else an ethical obligation. The nobility of work consisted not only in discharging an ethical obligation and in procuring a decent and honest liberty, but work was also considered noble as a way of procuring the means to help with charity those unable to work. Though a man be rich and have no need to work, he was not excused from the obligation. From this fundamental conception was derived the Christian ennobling of work, especially of manual labor so much despised in the classical world.¹ The Apostolic Canons speak of the duty of working for a livelihood. The Church mitigated the evils resulting from charity by restoring labor to honor. Slavery had degraded it and commerce had always been despised at Rome. But now before the eyes of an idle and poverty stricken multitude was displayed the example of Christ and his apostles, all workmen, an example which later was applied in the monasteries where the "perfect" life joined prayer with work, both to charitable purposes.²

1. Benigni, U., *Storia sociale della Chiesa*. Milan 1907, v.1. p.329
 2. Cambridge Medieval History, v. 1, p. 595.

Celsus, the great enemy of Christianity, had shamed the Christians because Jesus was the son of a peasant woman in poverty and of the working class, and because the apostles were humble workers. But Origen replied that these humble conditions were not a shame but a glory to Christianity because it was honest poverty and honest labor. Testimony to this attitude is also found in the inscriptions of the catacombs. In one of these, De Rossi says that the deceased is praised as a working woman. The inscription reads, "to mother Catianila, a working woman," the word used denoting one loving work.¹

So work provided Christians an economic means of support and helped to insure the perpetuity of the Christian group. Harnack says:

The Church recognized that every Christian brother had the right to a livelihood, and this was to be assured either by getting him work or by maintaining him. The attractive power of the Church was thus intensified and, from the economic standpoint, we attach high value to a union which provided work and at the same time kept hunger from those unfit for labor.²

In the application of this principle mentioned by Harnack, Christians used due precautions against those who would not work.

Didache, in Chapter 12 speaks of this precaution:

But let everyone that cometh in the name of the Lord be received and afterward ye shall prove and know him; for ye shall have understanding right and left. If he who cometh is a wayfarer, assist him as far as ye are able; but he shall not remain with you except for two or three days if need be. But if he willeth to abide with you being an artisan, let him work and eat; but if he hath no trade, according to your understanding

1. Benigni, U., op. cit., v. 1, p. 375.

2. Harnack, A., op. cit.

see to it that as a Christian, he shall not live with you idle. But if he willet not so to do, he is a Christ-monger. Watch that ye keep aloof from such.

(b) Self-sustaining through Business.

Christians also engaged freely in business as a means of self-support and in their dealings attracted attention for their honesty. Justin praises the honesty with which Christians transacted business. He claims that many pagans were won over to Christianity "by the extraordinary forbearance they have observed in their fellow travellers when defrauded, and by the honesty of those with whom they have transacted business."¹ This certainly points to the fact that Christians carried on business like other folk, even though more honestly.

Tertullian, in his Apology pleads the case for the Christians on the basis of their place in business:

We are not Indian Brahmins or Gymnosophysts who dwell in woods and exile themselves from ordinary human life; we are careful to give thanks to God our Creator, and we reject no creation of His hands, though we exercise a restraint upon ourselves, lest of any gift of His we make an immoderate or a sinful use. So we live with you in the world, abjuring neither forum nor shambles, nor bath, nor booth, nor workshop, nor inn, nor weekly market nor any other places of commerce. We sail with you, till the ground with you and trade with you. How it is we seem useless in your ordinary business, living with you and by you, I am unable to understand.²

This being true in Tertullian's time, it was even more true in the early fourth century that Christians were engaged in all

1. Justin, First Apology, XVI.

2. Tertullian, Apology XLII (Quoted in Clarke, G., Church History from Nero to Constantine, p. 92.

the business activities of the time. They were a part of society and a very important part.

From the Canons of Elvira (c. 300) we have witness of the extent of Christian participation in business in the early fourth century. By this time even bishops, presbyters and deacons were engaged in business activities, sometimes to the neglect of their proper office. The following is of interest.

Canon 19 says:

Bishops, presbyters and deacons are not to leave their places to engage in trade; nor are they to go the round of the provinces in search of profitable markets. To gain their living, let them send a son, a freedman, an agent, a friend or somebody; and, if they want to trade, let them trade within the province.

Canon 20 further says:

If any cleric be found taking usury, we decree that he be deposed and excommunicated. If, moreover, a layman be proved to have taken usury, and promise, on being reproved for it to cancel the debt and not to exact further, we decree that he may be pardoned; but that, if he persist in that iniquity, he be cast out of the Church.¹

Christian tradesmen went everywhere, carrying with them the gospel which they so dearly loved. They were missionaries supported by their own efforts in business and known for their sterling honesty. The free intercourse of churches was greatly facilitated by the travels of these Christian business men. The money which they made helped to strengthen the group economically.

1. Kidd, B. J., Documents Illustrative of Church History, p. 219
Trans. from C. J. Hefele, Histoire des Conciles.
I 212 sq.

(c) Self-sustaining through Public Office.

At first, Christians looked upon the powers and principalities as agents of the Evil One. They were themselves unable to assume public office because of the Emperor worship and pagan rites involved. Later they changed their attitude. We find Christians in the third century everywhere filling public offices. They had even come to the point where they could conceive of an Emperor as able to be a Christian and Emperor at the same time. While many of the public offices were unremunerative and even a financial burden, yet the fact that Christians were in public office shows them to have been economically independent individuals.

As early as Tertullian's time, it was admitted that Christians could hold public office without endangering their salvation. To quote Tertullian:

"We concede that a Christian may without endangering his salvation assume the honor and title of public functions - if he does not offer sacrifices nor authorize sacrifices, if he does not furnish victims, if he does not entrust anybody with the upkeep of temples, if he does not give games either at his own or public expense, if he does not arrange any festival, if he avoids all kinds of oath and abstains, while exercising power, from giving sentence in regard to the life or the honor of men (decisions as to money matters being excepted); if he does not proclaim edicts, nor act as a judge, nor put people into prison or inflict torture on them.¹

But was all this possible? As a matter of fact, the state did not go out of its way to make all these exceptions and naturally, conflicts between law and religious conviction arose

1. Quoted from Cambridge Medieval History, vol.1, p. 554.

every day. On many occasions, Christians submitted to the requirements of office in spite of their religious consequences. So the Church had to work out a penitentiary code for those who had been polluted by pagan practices.

In the time of Diocletian, the numbers of Christians in public office had increased to a large extent. Relieved by the imperial favor from the necessity of taking part in the sacrifices, Christians occupied high place in the administrative and the financial departments of the government. Thus Philoromus was a Justice at Alexandria (Eus. H. E. VIII ix 7); and in Phrygia, Adauctus was an official of the treasury (Eus. H. E. VIII xi 1). In municipal life, local magistrates who were Christians served as Flamen or Duovir and this was tolerated by the Church either at the price of a not too irksome penance or, as in the East, without much ado. Thus in a small town of Phrygia, all of whose inhabitants were Christian, the mayor, chief-constable, and the town-councillors were Christians to a man. (Eus. H. E. VIII xi 1). While at Heraclea in Thrace, one of the citizens found no difficulty in serving both as deacon and as member of the municipal council.¹

At the beginning of the Diocletian persecution the court was full of Christians. While out in the provinces the Christian bishop was often asked to perform public functions such as the repair of an aqueduct or the collection of the taxes. The fact that Christians were willing to perform these public

1. Kidd, B. J., Church History to A. D. 461. vol. 1 to 313. Oxford, 1922. p. 511.

functions gave them much greater importance for the state. This could not be overlooked by a truly enlightened ruler such as Constantine. Their participation in these offices of the state proved them to be individually self-sustaining - the really substantial element in society.

(d) Self-sustaining through Frugality.

The life of the Christian was a simple life, shorn of the luxuries and of worldly amusements. Their satisfactions were in spiritual things and in the carrying on of the work of the Church. From the first they were a frugal, self-denying people. One of the outstanding teachings of Jesus was self-denial. A noticeable ascetic tendency is seen to exist as a permanent feature of the Christian movement. Renunciation of all that was polluted was the condition necessary for purity and holiness of life. This frugality, along with the industry before mentioned, paved the way for a rapid economic advance in society.

In the second century literature we find this note from the Epistle to Diognetus:

They are poor and yet make many rich; they lack everything, yet in everything they abound.¹

The ability to get along on little made it possible for Christians to be economically secure in times of economic stress.

In Clement of Alexandria, we find testimonials to the frugality of Christians and an admonition to observe this

1. Kidd, B. J., Documents Illustrative of Church History.
Vol. I, p. 55.

frugality. He says in his Paedagogus:

There is no limit to epicurism among men. For it has driven them to sweet meats, honey cakes, and sugar plums; inventing a multitude of desserts, hunting after all manner of dishes. "Desire not," says the Scripture, "rich men's dainties," for they belong to a false and base life. For they have not learned that God has provided his creature (man, I mean) food and drink for sustenance, not for pleasure; since the body derives no advantage from extravagance in viands. For, quite to the contrary, those who use the most frugal fare are the strongest and healthiest, and the noblest; as domestics are healthier and stronger than their masters, and husbandmen than the proprietors; and not only more robust but wiser, as philosophers are wiser than rich men. For they have not buried the mind beneath food, nor deceived it with pleasures.¹

In Paedagogus II xiii, he says again:

Let there then be in the fruits of thy hands, sacred order, liberal communication and acts of economy.

In Paedagogus II i, again:

And "whether ye eat or drink do all to the glory of God" (I Cor. 10:31) aiming at true frugality, which the Lord also seems to me to have hinted at when he blessed the loaves and the cooked fishes with which he feasted the disciples, introducing a beautiful example of simple food.

Through such abstinence from luxuries, Christians were able to save their money. Their frugality came to be for them a great source of strength.

In their frugality, Christians also denied themselves of the amusements of the day. These were regarded as wicked but were also expensive in both time and money. The Christian avoided both pollution and expense. In the Octavius of Minucius

1. Clem. of Alex. Paed. Bk I ch. 1.

Felix (c. 180 A. D.), we find reference to this attitude from the pagan point of view. He makes the pagan in the dialogue say the following:

Do not the Romans, without the help of your God, rule, govern and possess the whole world, and hold sway over yourselves? But you, in the meantime, in your suspense and anxiety abstain from all legitimate amusements; you never visit the shows, never join the processions, never attend the public banquets. You express abhorrence of the sacred games, of meat already offered in sacrifice, of libations poured upon the altars.....You never crown your heads with garlands, nor grace your bodies with perfumes. - You even refuse to lay wreaths on the grave, pale and trembling wretches, who deserve to be pitied - but by our gods.¹

Meanwhile, the Christians were saving both time and money toward that economic importance which commanded the attention of Constantine a little over a century later.

Tertullian gives us the Christian attitude from the Christian point of view.

We keep aloof from the theatre, which is the private meeting place of unchastity, where nothing is approved except that which is not approved elsewhere. Thus its chief attraction is chiefly gotten up by filth, which an Atellan pantomime, which even an actor of burlesque represents through female roles, destroying the sex of chastity, so that they may blush more easily at home than on the stage..... Nor is there any place for Christians in the amphitheatre where gladiators slay each other for the entertainment of the public, and where blood curdling scenes are enacted when wild beasts rend their victims.²

The Christian, in avoiding the theatre and the amphitheatre, missed one of the disintegrating forces of Roman society. They put their disapproval upon the moral laxity of the theatre

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1. Kidd, B. J., Documents Illustrative of the History of the Church, Vol. I. p. 113. Minucius Felix - Octavius VII.
 2. Tertullian, De Spectaculis, 19.

and upon the cruelty of the gladiatorial combats. One of the most far reaching changes introduced by Christianity was the idea of the sacredness of human life as such. This idea was quite novel to the pagan world and stood distinctly opposed to the gladiatorial shows. Although they were not immediately abolished upon the triumph of Christianity, they became gradually discredited and were put down before the end of the fourth century.¹

Through frugality, Christians were spared from economic waste in luxuries and amusements. This, coupled with their eager and zealous application to work and business could not but result in wealth.

(c) Wealth, the Proof of Individual Self-Support.

In regard to the wealth which Christians possessed, we find most numerous references to their being deprived of property in the persecutions. It might be inferred that the persecutors had as their motive the securing of the property of Christians so unfortunate as to fall into their hands.

Dio Cassius mentions the fact that during the Domitian persecution, "some were put to death, while others were at least deprived of their property."² Later on, Athenagoras complains of similar deprivation of property:

For the fine imposed by our persecutors does not aim merely at our property But when we have surrendered our property, they plot against

1. Bury, J. B., A History of the Later Roman Empire, N. Y. 1889, p. 21.

2. Dio Cassius, Epitome LXVII xiv 1-3. (Kidd, B.J., Doc. p. 160)

our very bodies and souls, pouring upon us wholesale charges of crimes of which we are guiltless even in thought.¹

The same was true in the Valerian persecution. Cyprian points out that according to the Rescript of Valerian:

Bishops, presbyters and deacons should forthwith be punished; that senators and men of rank and Roman knights should be deprived of their property, and if, when deprived of their possessions, they should still continue to be Christians, then they should lose their heads also; that matrons should be deprived of their property and banished; that whosoever of Caesar's household had either before confessed, or should now confess, should forfeit their property, and be sent in chains as conscripts to Caesar's farms.²

All these references point to the possession of property by individual Christians and such property as would attract the cupidity of the persecutors. In what did this property consist? It is most probable that it consisted in land and houses or in ships or industrial shops.

In the social revolution in progress during the third century, the old aristocracy lost its power. A new class of wealthy men arose, among whom were many Christians. In fact, Christians became the most wealthy part of society, able to carry on their own charity and the work of their Church. Clement and Origen speak of wealthy people in the Church. Clement's "Quis dives salvetur?" discusses not rich people who require conversion, but those who are Christians already. The Paedagogus also proves that the Church, for which its instruction was designed, embraced a large number of cultured people.³

1. Athenagoras, Legatio Pro Christianos, c. 1.

2. Cyprian, Epistle LXXXI sec. 1.

3. Harnack, A., op. cit., v. 2, p. 37.

Throughout the Church, many Christians were to be found who, by birth or wealth, belonged to good society, people who had so much to lose that a persecution was a doubly severe test of faith, as both Cyprian and Eusebius recognize. The social position of the great teachers is worthy of note. Many of them sprang from families of wealth and distinction. Tertullian was the son of a proconsular centurion who was able to furnish his son the benefits of a legal and rhetorical education. Clement of Alexandria was also the son of wealthy parents, as his culture and extensive travels seem to imply. Cyprian, we know was of patrician descent, and inherited large possessions. Two other distinguished teachers of the third century, Dionysius of Alexandria and Gregory Thaumaturgus, were of wealthy and honorable families. So was Pamphilus of Caesarea, the friend of Eusebius, and founder of the famous library in that city.

That Christians were individually self-sustaining and of high production value to the state could not have escaped the eye of Constantine. They were distinguished by their possessions and by their frugal use of these possessions, as the most stable element in society.

4. The Influence of a Self-sustaining Church.

We have noted the economic stability of individual Christians. Now we shall note the Church as a self-sustaining organism. When Constantine was looking for a religion to furnish his new Empire with the religious basis of prosperity, he could see in Christianity a religion requiring the minimum of state aid. This made it attractive to him as furnishing the largest

benefits at least cost.

One of the distinctive characteristics of the Church was its voluntary means of support. Going back to its ancient Hebrew heritage, we find the tithes and the offerings brought in regularly. This was carried over into Christianity but it seems that with the Christians, the voluntary offering was the chief means of Church support. Tertullian speaks in his Apology (39) of this voluntary support:

Even if there is a sort of common fund, it is not made up of money payed in fees, as for a worship by contract. Each of us puts in a trifle on the monthly day, or when he pleases; but only if he pleases, and only if he is able, for no man is obliged, but contributes of his own free will. These are as if were deposits of piety; for it is not paid out thence for feasts and drinkings and the thankless eating houses, but for feeding and burying the needy, for boys and girls deprived of means and parents, for old folk now confined to the house: also for them that are ship-wrecked, for any who in the islands or in the prisons, if only it be for the cause of God's people, becoming the nurslings of their own confession.¹

Tertullian here draws the contrast to the guilds and associations of the time who assessed their members and used the assessment for "feasts and drinkings and thankless eating houses." Tertullian is impressed with the liberality of Christians. Their giving to the Church became an indissoluble part of public worship.² They not only provided for the support of the organization but for a vast program of relief.

In the non-Christian associations the means of support was somewhat similar and there may be some connection between

1. Tertullian, Apology, 39.

2. Kennedy, H. A., Vital Forces of the Early Church, London, 1920, p. 30.

the methods of support in the associations and the methods of support in the Church. Members of the associations paid regular contributions, usually month by month into a common chest and the general body sanctioned the disposal of the funds. The office bearers were usually the rich members who were expected to contribute liberally toward the objects of common interest. Money might be given, or buildings, or statues or other benefits for the enrichment of the society. Ambition led many holders of office to exceed the stipulated gifts and generosity was repaid by many kinds of honors - in particular, eulogistic inscriptions, special titles and statues. The resources of the guilds were still further increased by the adoption of rich persons as patrons, who were honored in proportion to their benefactions. The wealth of the guilds naturally increased when Marcus Aurelius made them capable of taking bequests.¹ Many endowments and rich properties were acquired in this manner. This almost reminds us of the modern financial campaign. The Church used many of the same means of inducing the wealthy to contribute largely. The expenditure of funds, however, was left to the bishop, and charity was the chief object outside the necessary expenses of the Church.

The Apostolic Constitutions also give us some further light on Church support:

Let the bishop esteem such food and raiment sufficient as suits necessity and decency. Let him not make use of the Lord's goods as another's but moderately; "for the laborer is worthy of his regard" (Luke 10:7). Let him not be luxurious

1. Encyclopedia of Religion and Ethics, "Gilds".

in diet, or fond of idle furniture, but contented with so much alone as is for his sustenance.

Let him use those tenths and first fruits, which are given according to the command of God; as also let him dispense in right manner the free-will offerings which are brought in on account of the poor, to the orphans, the widows, and strangers in distress, as having God for the examiner of his accounts, who has committed the disposition to him.¹

We note first that the Bishop was to receive his living from the gifts of the Church and that there was a tendency to extravagance on the part of some. Also that these offerings consisted of "tithes, first fruits and free-will offerings."

However, it seems that in some cases at least, the Bishop pursued a secular occupation for his support.

For we ourselves, besides our attention to the word of the Gospel, do not neglect our inferior employments, for some of us are fisherman, some tent makers, some husbandmen, that so we may never be idle.....For the Lord God hates the slothful. For no one of those who are dedicated to God ought to be idle.²

In this way the burden was lifted from the Church and offerings turned to the further program of the Church.

But with the growing organization, the need for funds to pay the officers of the Church was large. The roll of these officers was large even when judged by present day standards. There were large numbers of bishops, presbyters and deacons besides deaconesses, readers, singers, doorkeepers and others, all of whom had to be paid out of the church treasury.

In striking contrast to the state of public insolvency

1. Apostolic Canons, Bk. II sec. iv.

2. Ibid., sec. viii.

of the third century was the prosperity of the Church. It was always possessed of sufficient means to support its clergy, to defray the expenses of services in the churches and to maintain the cemeteries, besides the great relief program. Large funds were needed to carry on these activities.

One of the largest sources of the Church's support consisted in the donations of wealthy converts. Marcion, on his conversion, gave 200,000 sesterces to the Church of Rome. This was, however, returned to him when he turned to the Gnostic heresy.¹ St. Cyprian sold his gardens on the day of his baptism and gave them to the Church.² De Rossi gives the account of a Greek family who, on being converted, renounced their earthly possessions which they gave to the Christian poor. They were arrested on the charge of seducing the people. The authorities demanded: "Where did you procure this enormous wealth and all this money with which you seduce the people?" This shows that a suspicion existed in the minds of the Roman authorities of some immense fund available as a means of active Christian propaganda. The extensive liberality of the Christian group could not but create this impression. In this light, Constantine saw the Church not only as a self-sustaining body but as a body possessed of wealth sufficient to be giving it away. This would seem like incredible riches to one who could not procure enough to satisfy his own desires.

In the rallying of the support of wealthy members, the

1. Tertullian, *De Praescr.* 30. Adv. Marcion IV 4.

2. Pontius, *Vita Cypri.* c. 2. Healey, P. J. *op. cit.*, p. 124.

Church, like the gilds, made use of the desire for popularity. The giving of large sums was attended with unusual honors and the hearty approval of the group. The bequest of large fortunes was an attractive means for the wealthy to obtain favor and still keep possession of their property until death.¹ It was easy to get a rich man to leave his money to the Church at his death. Childless families were common; family ties were very weak; the desire to make bequests to relatives was often very slight. On the other hand, the interest in one's own personality had been developed to a high point, involving a desire for a continued happy life after death. The Christian doctrine was well adapted to the satisfaction of this desire, and a convenient way of attaining eternal bliss without serious privations in this life was open to the rich if they willed their property to the Church at death when it was no longer of use to them. Such a bequest of property, they thought, might purchase for them eternal salvation.²

The Church thus accumulated the means of a part of the upper classes into a gigantic mortmain, the revenues of which were spent for the benefit of men struck by misfortune in all its forms and for the support of the Church. It is not hard to see what a formidable instrument of power was represented by this accumulated wealth and the alms and benefactions which it sustained in the midst of the general crisis of the third century. Christianity became a faith with a spiritual and a

1. Ferrero, *op. cit.*, p. 92.

2. Kautsky, K., *op. cit.*, p. 418.

temporal power.¹

(b) Church Buildings

Beyond the matter of church support, a further proof of the self-sustaining church is to be found in the church buildings in which the congregations assembled. The earliest special places of assembly were the holy sites and the burial chapels of the martyrs. The subterranean chapels in the catacombs belong to this class. Probably the first specifically Christian buildings were martyria - tomb chambers, usually round, which were practically memorial churches.²

Harnack says that there is no evidence for Church buildings prior to Commodus. Possibly some were in existence but we know nothing of them. People met in private houses previous to this. In the *Acta Justinii et Sociorum* (c. 163 A.D.) we find the following dialogue:

Rusticus the prefect said, "Where do you assemble?"
Justin said, "Where each one chooses and can; for do you fancy that we all meet in the same place?"
Not so, because the God of the Christians is not circumscribed by place; but, being invisible, fills heaven and earth, and everywhere is worshipped and glorified by the faithful."
Rusticus replied, "Tell me where you assemble, or into what place do you collect your followers?"
Justin said, "I live above one Martinus, at the Trinothian Bath; and during the whole time I am unaware of any other meeting than his. And if any one wished to come to me, I communicated to him the doctrines of truth." Rusticus said, "Are you then a Christian?" Justin said, "I am a Christian."³

1. Ferrero, *op. cit.*, p. 92.

2. *Cambridge Medieval History*, vol. 1, p. 609.

3. Kidd, B. J., *op. cit.*, vol. 1, p. 85.

With the growth of the congregations, private houses soon became too small. From the beginning of the third century there were special places of worship. An ancient church at Edessa is said on good authority to have existed before 201 A.D. The writings of Tertullian, Hippolytus, Minucius Felix, Origen and Cyprian show that henceforth there were special places or buildings for worship, called "domus dei, ecclesia or dominicum." The period of their rise was in all probability during the reign of Commodus, coincident with the rise of the priestly hierarchy and the parallel movement for the consecration of objects and places. The growth of Christian congregations required larger and larger buildings. The ecclesiastical consciousness induced an interest in the place of worship and meeting. Besides, the priesthood and the cultus which approximated more than ever those of paganism, required buildings of a special nature. It was during the unbroken peace that lasted from Gallienus to the beginning of the fourth century that the largest number of churches were built. Eusebius says explicitly that these large churches, called basilicas, were being built from the time of Gallienus.¹ There are few details for this period, yet there are suggestive general notices of the growth of the churches in numbers, splendor and influence. One marked outward token of this prosperity was the number of splendid ecclesiastical edifices erected. We read of Christian governors, and of the freedom to profess Christianity granted to members of the Imperial household - "wives, and children, and

1. Harnack, A., op. cit., v. 2, p. 87.

servants." (Eus. H. E. VIII 1). Mention is made of the multitudes crowding in every city to the houses of worship - "on whose account, not being content with the ancient buildings, they erected spacious churches from the foundation in all the cities." (Eus. H. E. VIII 1).

An inscription from the tomb of Bishop Eugenius of Laodicea Combusta has been published. He held the see immediately after the cessation of Diocletian's persecution and speaks of the rebuilding of the whole of his church from its foundations, together with the colonnaded court which surrounded it. Eusebius speaks of such rebuilding as general but says that the new churches were larger and more splendid than those that had been destroyed.¹

Lactantius furnishes us a description of the destruction of the church at Nicomedia.

The gates having been forced open, they searched everywhere for an image of the Divinity. The books of the Holy Scriptures were found and they were committed to the flames; the utensils and furniture of the church were abandoned to pillage, all was rapine, confusion, tumult.

That church, situated on rising ground was within view of the palace, and Diocletian and Galerius stood as if on a watch tower, disputing long whether it ought to be set on fire.

The sentiment of Diocletian prevailed, who dreaded lest so great a fire, being once kindled, some part of the city might be burnt, for there were many large buildings that surrounded the church.

Then the Praetorian Guards came in battle array with axes and other iron instruments and having been let loose everywhere, they, in a

1. Cambridge Medieval History, Vol. I, p. 609.

few hours, levelled that very lofty edifice to ground.¹

We have here a Christian church located in an important part of the Imperial city, near the palace and surrounded by other important buildings. The church itself must have been an imposing structure. The Church was therefore in possession of church buildings which further proved it to be self-sustaining.

(c) Other Property of the Church

That the Church held other property besides her buildings is certain. Healey says:

It is pointed out that the right which Christians undoubtedly possessed at the beginning of the third century, of holding property in common may with equal plausibility be regarded as a concession due to the tolerance of such an emperor as Commodus.²

Healey does not think that Christians organized first as burial societies. There are resemblances but the idea itself of collegia and burial societies, he thinks, was repulsive to Christians. It would be natural, however, to think of burial grounds as the first property possessed by the Church in common. That it held all of its property by the rights of the burial society is not to be substantiated. In the time of Constantine the Church was distinguished as a corporation capable of receiving property and of holding it as Church property. Earlier confiscations and restorations prove that the Church had held property long before the time of Constantine.³

1. Lactantius, De Mortibus Persecutorum, C. XII.

2. Healey, P. J., op. cit., p. 60.

3. Cambridge Medieval History, Vol. 1, p. 591.

By the time of Constantine, the Church had become a veritable banking institution. It had been receiving bequests and donations through more than a century. Besides, these were years of stress when private property was not safe. A man possessing property found it safer to turn his property over to the Church with the assurance of assistance later on if he needed it, than to try to hold his property himself. His money would be virtually on deposit with the Church. It is not surprising to learn that Calixtus (Pope 218-223 A. D.) was a banker previous to his elevation to the papacy; that large numbers of Christians, particularly widows and orphans entrusted their money to his bank, and that he had large loans out at good interest to Jewish bankers.¹ It had been common practice for even the pagan temples to receive money or jewels on deposit to be returned to the owner at a later date. This function was taken over by the Christian Church. Thus, through bequests, donations and deposits, the Church held considerable property which it used in the carrying out of its program.

Such a self-sustaining, prosperous, endowed Church might well excite the cupidity of an Emperor. Diocletian had tried to deprive them of their property and of their very lives through persecution but had miserably failed. Constantine, on the other hand, enlisted the help of the Church in re-establishing the prosperity of the Empire.

5. Influence of the Church as an Organized Economic Unit.

One of Constantine's chief interests in the restoration

1. Edwards, L. P., op. cit., p. 37.

of prosperity to the Empire was the restoration of the unity of the Empire. Chaos had reigned for more than a century. The peacefully united Empire of the Augustan Age seemed to be a thing of the past. It was this golden age of peace and prosperity which Constantine hoped to restore. Consequently he was looking about for a unifying agency. This he found in the organization of the Christian Church which had achieved prosperity in its own economic life. Therefore, he held high hopes that this organized economic unit would restore prosperity to the Empire. The organization of the Church, centering in the monarchical episcopate, made the Church of high economic importance to Constantine.

Although the Augustan Age had realized a great political unity in the Empire over an immense variety of religions and cults, the new epoch was beginning to create a great new religious unity under the leadership of the Christian Church. The Graeco-Latin civilization, destroyed in its material elements by anarchy, depopulation and economic ruin was reconstructed in its spiritual life by Christianity which replaced polytheism by monotheism, and built a universal religious society wholly preoccupied in moral perfection.¹ This community of believers, united, disciplined, and directed by leaders whom they obeyed, presented to the state a cheering spectacle of order, the product of a well administered government which already showed a political consciousness. It was time for the state to make use

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1. Ferrero, G., op. cit., p. 13.

of this unifying agency.¹

It was the leadership of the bishop of the congregation who was the economic administrator, that gave organized economic stability to the group. The champions and martyrs of the early congregations who had surrendered their possessions and given their lives for the liberation of the poor and miserable, had merely laid the foundation for the new hierarchy.

The bishop was concerned from the first with the administration of the funds of the Church. Gifts were laid at his feet and consecrated by him, then dispensed by him through the deacons to those who had need. This post required a considerable degree of honesty, business knowledge and kindness. The appointment of such an administrator was inevitable. Each organization having property must have such an administrator. In the beginning, the bishops discharged their duties in connection with their regular trades. They kept banks, practiced medicine, worked as silver smiths, tended sheep or sold goods in the open market. It was such business men who were chosen for the administration of the Church business. But as the congregation grew, it became impossible to discharge its numerous economic functions as an avocation. The bishop was employed by the congregation and received a salary in payment. Presbyters and deacons were elected to assist the bishop. Thus was created a bureaucracy headed by the bishop which became more independent and powerful. Finally the bishop superseded both the apostles

1. Guignebert, Christianity, p. 167.

and prophets because of his economic power and took over the spiritual direction of the Church as well. The Bishops who were the holders of the cash were chosen from the sober, businesslike practical men of the congregation. These men knew the value of having many wealthy communicants. So they helped to make the wealthy at home in the Church.¹ The act of adapting the congregations to the requirements of the rich and cultured meant a weakening of the influence of the apostles and prophets and a reducing of their tendencies to absurdity. In the struggle between the bishops and the apostles, the bishops were victorious. This created a unity in the congregation centering in the economic administrator.

The international character of the movement also contributed to an increase in the power of the bishop. The congresses of delegates which met, beginning with the second century were composed of bishops. Thus the Catholic Church was formed, welding together in one great economic unit all of Christendom. What the congregation lost in power was gained in the strength and unity of the movement as a whole. Thus again the bishop's authority in his congregation was heightened by the support which the Catholic Church gave him. It was only natural that the property of the congregation now should become the property of the administrators to be held by them as a body.²

Harnack says of the importance of the episcopate:

Within the Church organization, the most

1. Kautsky, K., Foundations of Christianity, 1925, p. 439.

2. Ibid., p. 447.

weighty and significant creation was that of the monarchical episcopate..It was the bishops properly speaking who held together the individual members of the churches.....The extent to which the episcopate, along with the other clerical offices which it controlled, formed the backbone of the Church, is shown by the fierce war waged against it by the state during the third century by Decius, Valerian and Diocletian.¹

What the emperors feared was the power of the Church as an organization. What this meant throughout the Empire may be inferred from a glimpse of the organization of the local Roman church over which Cornelius was elected to preside. "In it," writes Cornelius to Fabius, bishop of Antioch, "there were besides the one bishop, as many as forty-six presbyters, fifty-two exorcists, readers and ushers and over fifteen hundred widows and persons in distress, all of whom the grace and kindness of the Lord nourishes."²

It is to be noted too that the ecclesiastical organization came to approximate that of the city in Rome and of the provinces and dioceses throughout the Empire. Fabian constituted the seven ecclesiastical regions of Rome and placed each under one of the seven deacons.³ Out in the provinces, when the municipal organization broke down, the work of administration was taken up by the Christian bishop who was the best business administrator in the community.

Among the great organizers of the Catholic Church, Cyprian probably stands as the greatest. The central idea of his

1. Harnack, A., op. cit., vol. 2, p. 439.

2. Cornelius (Eus. H. E. VI xliii).

3. L. Duchesne, Christian Worship, p. 245.

life was the unity of the Catholic Church. It has been said that this concept is like the root whence issue all his doctrinal writings. It was he who developed the almost perfect organization of the Church in North Africa centering in Carthage.

The fact that the Catholic Church centered in the Bishop of Rome, brought it even more vividly to the attention of Constantine. By the year 200 A. D. Rome had already become the most eminent and influential center of Christianity. The rise of Alexandria and Carthage to importance in the Christian thought and life of the third century could not rob Rome of its leadership. Their attainment of Christian significance was far younger than that of the capitol of the Empire.¹ The famous quotation from Irenaeus points out this supremacy:

In the greatest, most ancient and well known church, founded by two most glorious Apostles, Peter and Paul at Rome, we can confute all those who in any other way, either for self-pleasing or vain-glory, or blindness or badness, hold unauthorized meetings.

For unto this Church, which holds a leading position among the churches, must needs resort every church - inasmuch as the Apostolic tradition is always preserved by the faithful who are everywhere.²

The Catholic Church comprised a vast hierarchy of bishops centering in the Roman bishop. It was a great network of organization based upon the economic functions of the Church but comprising its doctrinal and expansional functions as well. In

1. Walker, Williston, A History of the Christian Church, p. 65.

2. Irenaeus, Against Heresies, Kidd, B. J., Doc. Ill. Ch. Hist. p. 125.

extent and unity, though not of course in the number of its adherents, it might seem to rival the organization of the Empire itself.¹

The recognition of Christianity by Constantine at the beginning of the fourth century was in consequence of the unity of the Catholic Church and of the bishop's absolute power within the Church. He saw in the bishops a unifying agency, capable of dealing with economic affairs and able to render him most valuable service in the restoration of prosperity to the Empire. The result was that he made the Catholic Church a department of the state with the Emperor its Pontifex Maximus in fact if not in name.

6. The Triumph.

This brings us now to the circumstances of the triumph when Constantine and Licinius issued the famous Edict of Milan. Up to that hour Christianity had been an illicit religion and it had been a crime to be a Christian. The Edict of Milan proclaimed absolute freedom in religion. It was the charter of Christianity. Restitution was to be made to the Christian body of all churches and other buildings which had been destroyed or siezed during the persecution.

We can see in this edict a diplomatic act on the part of the Emperors. Some think of Constantine as converted to Christianity, but it seems that his act was more diplomatic than religious. His chief interest was the restoration of the

1. Kidd, B. J., A History of the Church, Vol. I, p. 346. Oxford, 1922.

Empire with himself at its head. To him the question of uppermost importance was, what agency will be of greatest use to me? What group is strongest economically? What group can pray down the most prosperity? What group can best promote orderly government? These were prime interests to this military leader who was only in process of establishing his power. The Church evidenced quite as much faith in him as he did in the Church by accepting his offer of favor. But as it turned out, it meant triumph for both Constantine and the Church.

Constantine selected the Church as the best foundation for the new prosperity which he hoped to establish. Foakes-Jackson says of Constantine:

His real title to fame is that he understood that the permanence of his Empire depended on the Christian Church which his predecessors had endeavored to destroy. That the union of Church and Empire had some disastrous results cannot be denied; but, humanly speaking, that either could have continued without the other is unthinkable.¹

Christianity was seen by him as having a secure basis for its importance in society in its economic stability. Christianity, by teaching the virtues of honesty, frugality, simplicity and charity had laid secure foundations for her triumph. The societies of men and women working hard and living plainly and peaceably under the direct supervision and control of the ecclesiastical authority were models of what Constantine would wish his whole Empire to be. They were the sure foundations

1. Foakes-Jackson, Studies in the Life of the Early Church.
Doran, 1924, p. 224.

for a stable civil government.

The real triumph, fully assured, did not come until Constantine himself had fully established his power over the Empire. When Constantine assembled and entertained the bishops at Nicaea, the Church was welcomed as his indispensable ally. On this occasion Eusebius could not contain his delight. The Emperor assembled the very men whom the government had persecuted. Many bore the marks of persecution. "One might have thought," says Eusebius, "that a picture of Christ's Kingdom was shadowed forth, and a dream rather than a reality."¹

Beginning with the Edict of Milan, favors were showered upon the Church by Constantine. The clergy were allowed to receive gifts and legacies freely. Laws were enacted to increase their privileges. They were relieved of the most burdensome office, that of "decurion" which entailed responsibility for the taxes of the district. The Councils of the Church became part of the organization of the Empire. Constantine's ideal was "a free Church in a free Empire." Christianity became a privileged religion. It was the sure way to magistracies and important positions. The Church was now honored from one end of the Roman world to the other.²

Going a little more deeply into the motives of Constantine, we see him striking a bargain with the Church. Ros-tovtzeff speaks of this motive as follows:

The time was ripe for a reconciliation of

1. Foakes-Jackson, op. cit., p. 241.

2. Ibid., p. 242.

state and Church, each of which needed the other. It was a stroke of genius in Constantine to realize this and to act upon it. He offered peace to the Church, provided that she would recognize the state and support the imperial power. The Church accepted the offer Gradually the Christian minority became, with the help of the state, a strong majority and imposed itself on those who never were able nor prepared to fight and to make sacrifices for their religious creed. Even to them Christianity brought, in the main, a satisfactory solution of their religious aspirations.¹

It was really a bargain between Constantine and the Church in which each party had something of value to the other. It was largely on an economic basis. This is why the economic stability of the Church was of such large importance.

Guignebert says of Constantine's attitudes at this time:

He realized that persecution had not only failed but that it, moreover, seriously disturbed ordinary life, because the hatred with which the Christians had formerly been regarded by the nation scarcely existed any longer. They had increased in numbers, were better known, and more especially they now lived like everybody else. He knew the Church to be a very active force and that all the rulers who had fought against her had experienced some misfortune. Finally he had learned that Maxentius, with a large and seasoned army had taken care to invoke the aid of all pagan gods by means of prayers, sacrifices and even magic rites. For him, therefore, no alternative remained but to make an appeal to Christ.....He was the victor, and regarded himself as more or less in debt to Christ. Gratitude, faith and policy all combined to suggest the Edict of Milan.²

We see Constantine interested in the benefits of religion. He must have divine help in his enterprise. Maxentius

1. Rostovtzeff, op. cit., p. 456.

2. Guignebert, op. cit., p. 169.

had invoked the aid of all the gods. Constantine was without funds to establish a state cult, to build temples and employ priests. He wanted to remedy the excessive taxation in order to reduce the burdens of the people. But his treasury needed money. Here was his opportunity to secure the help of one God for the mere trifle of state protection of a strong but persecuted people. Here were temples all in order with an organized hierarchy, sustained by the voluntary gifts of the organization. Here was a brave and a courageous people who had proven their bravery by enduring persecution. They were orderly and simple in their manners. They were the true type of Roman citizen upon whom could be rebuilt the ancient Augustan Empire of peace and prosperity. It was wise economic policy for Constantine to secure all these benefits for his new Empire. That he thought it proper to pay something more in return than mere protection is proved by his financial aid to the African churches and the privileges which he granted to the clergy. The document of his letter to the African churches is preserved by Eusebius:

Constantine Augustus to Caecilianus, bishop of Carthage. Since it is our pleasure that something should be granted in all the provinces of Africa and Numidia and Mauretania, to certain ministers of the legitimate and most holy Catholic Religion, to defray their expenses, I have written to Ursus, the illustrious finance minister of Africa and have directed him to make provision to pay to thy Firmness three thousand "folles".....But if thou should find that anything is wanting in the fulfilment of this purpose of mine thou shalt demand without hesitation from Herallides, our treasurer, whatever thou findest to be necessary.¹

1. Eusebius, H. E. X vi.

Considering all the benefits which the Church afforded him, he was getting off far cheaper than he would, had he instituted a state cult of say Jupiter Capitolinus.

In his exemption of the clergy from public duties, Constantine still further reveals his motives. It is clearly seen here that his chief interest was the prosperity of the state and that he thought this was to be obtained through reverence to Christ, "the Deity." Thus, he shows that the Church, and especially the hierarchy have become of extreme economic importance to him.

(1) Greetings to thee, our most esteemed Anulinus. Since it appears from many circumstances that, when religion is despised, in which is preserved the chief reverence for the most holy celestial power, great dangers are brought upon public affairs; but that when legally adopted and observed, it affords the most signal prosperity to the Roman name and remarkable felicity to all affairs of men, through the divine beneficence - it has seemed good to me, most esteemed Anulinus, that those men who give their services with due sanctity and with constant observance to this law, to the worship of divine religion, should receive recompense for their labors.

(2) Wherefore it is my will that those within the province entrusted to thee, in the Catholic Church, over which Caecilianus presides, who give their services to this holy religion, and who are commonly called clergymen, be entirely exempted from all public duties, that they may not by any error or sacrilegious negligence be drawn away from the service due to the Deity, but may devote themselves without any hindrance to their own law. For it seems that when they show greatest reverence to the Deity, the largest benefits accrue to the State. Farewell, our most esteemed and beloved Anulinus.¹

1. Eusebius, H. E. X vii.

Even Galerius, before Constantine, had desired that "the Christians, in consequence of this toleration, pray to God for our welfare, and for that of the public and for their own; that the commonweal may continue safe in every quarter, and that they themselves may live securely in their habitations."

The Church and especially the clergy had become a power with which every ruler of the Empire had to reckon. Through his alliance with the ecclesiastical clergy, Constantine was victorious among the pretenders to the throne. The bishops now ruled the Empire by the side of the Emperor and state authority was placed at the disposal of the bishops for carrying out the decisions of the Councils.¹

Such was the economic importance of the Church and such its influence upon Constantine that it caused him to give to the Church its supreme opportunity. Through its largely increased numbers, through the stable, self-sustaining, even wealthy character of its individual members, through the self-supported church, through the strong, unified organization, the Church proved to Constantine its economic importance and secured from him the favor of the Empire.

1. Kautsky, K., Foundations of Christianity, p. 448.

CONCLUSION

With the triumph under Constantine, the struggle of the Church was not over. It had merely passed a crisis in its existence and won for itself the opportunity to go on. From this time on the future of the Christian movement was assured. From this point onward the struggle was for expansion, for purity of doctrine, for adaptation to the needs of society.

The thesis that certain economic factors played an important part in the triumph of Early Christianity at the time of Constantine has been maintained in this study. This is in harmony with, though not subservient to the doctrine of the economic interpretation of history. Our conclusions are as follows:

First, we conclude that Christian Socialism was an important economic factor in the growth of the Early Church to the time of triumph. Included in this factor, we find the relief of poverty and all kinds of human need along with the attitude that wealth is for use, and the communistic principle of giving the surplus to the Church for distribution to those who had need. This Christian Socialism was a great drawing power for the Church and enabled the group to endure the times of economic stress in the third century.

Second, we conclude that the declining prosperity of the Empire in the third century was another important factor in the triumph of Early Christianity. It produced a situation

of economic instability in which many were attracted to the economically stable shelter of the Church. It produced a disorganization of government favorable to the growth of Christianity, which was still considered an illicit religion. It showed in bold relief the love, charity and liberality of Christians against a background of oppression, extortion and compulsion on the part of the State. Thus the whole growth and activity of the Church was magnified in its appearance of prosperity upon the background of the chaotic economic conditions of the time.

Third, we conclude that the economic importance of the Church at the time of Constantine was an important factor in gaining his favor which constituted for Christianity its triumph and supreme opportunity to become a permanently established movement in world history. This economic importance was apparent in the large numbers of Christians scattered throughout the Empire, in the economically self-sustaining character of individual Christians, in the self-sustaining character of the Church, in its effectively organized control by the episcopal hierarchy which was in effect an economic bureaucracy, and finally in the large economic benefits which Constantine believed would accrue to the State through the prayers of the bishops and of all Christians under their guidance.

Through the operation of these economic factors, the Church was established upon a firm basis of property endowments and other assurances of perpetuity, not the least of which was

the Imperial favor. Persecutions were at an end and except for a slight reverse under Julian and henceforth the Church had the support of the State in carrying out its vast program.

The social viewpoint of this gigantic phenomenon of Christian achievement shows us groups of real people living in a real, though not too hospitable world. We see them working out their problems of existence and adapting themselves to the social conditions of their time, all the while holding up a new social principle of group solidarity in which the strong help the weak and all are enabled to stand. Back of this was devotion to one Lord, Jesus, the Christ, and to one ecclesia, the Catholic Church, represented to them locally by their bishop. We see them in times of stress and in times of peaceful pursuance of their daily occupations and of their religious practices. We see them becoming a part of the society in which they lived. In fact, they were becoming the most influential part, as work, frugality and a simple life devoted to living the best life has always tended to raise the scale of living. We see them in the throes of the final persecution, still courageous and willing to sacrifice property and even life itself rather than deny their faith. We see these Christians at the time of triumph in the ecstasies of joy, girding themselves to build anew their churches and to make the Church co-extensive with the Empire.

The triumph of the Church was really the triumph of the socialistic principle that cooperation is superior to competition as an economic program. It was the economic importance of the

Church, gained by the application of this principle during the most rigorous times of economic crisis, that gave to the Church its triumph. Constantine himself recognized this principle when he saw the futility of persecution and sought the co-operation of the Church in the restoration of prosperity to the declining Empire. Since the economic interests of Constantine were his chief interests in granting the Church his favor, we conclude that the economic factors in this triumph of the Church were the most important factors and that the future of the Church was determined by them. Because the Church was strong economically at the crisis point when Constantine appeared, it gained the opportunity to become a world power.

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